

DWAYNE KLING: LUCK IS THE RESIDUE OF DESIGN

Interviewee: Dwayne Kling

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Description

Dwayne Kling's career is a story of hard work, a desire to be the best, and opportunity. Dwayne came to Nevada as a semi-pro baseball player, playing for Harrah's Club, in the summer of 1947. He was between his first and second year of college at St. Mary's when he came to Reno, and while that summer was his introduction to casinos, it was not his introduction to gambling. Even as a college student Dwayne liked to gamble, whether on a card game, a racehorse, or a presidential election. Even then, it was a source of income for him. He earned his spending money in college playing pinochle and booking bets on horse races.

In Reno and the casinos, Dwayne found a home. At the end of the summer (he actually played ball in Reno two summers), Dwayne went back to school to study business and play baseball. Indeed, baseball was the theme of the first twenty-five years of his life. He played baseball in grammar school, high school, college, and in the army. After school and the army, he played professional baseball in the Yankee farm system until 1954.

In 1954, Dwayne returned to Nevada, and the theme of the next forty years of his life was casino gaming. His plan was to be a history teacher when he retired from baseball, and he took a job carrying change while he prepared for a teaching certificate. That job, carrying change on the graveyard shift at Harolds Club, turned into a career, and the history teacher in him had to wait another forty years. Of gambling as he saw it that first summer Dwayne said, "Gambling was fascinating . . . it was exciting . . . and I liked to play."

Dwayne took casinos and casino gambling as seriously as he had taken baseball and school. When he was in the lineup, Dwayne played to win, to be the best. In a way, his casino career was typical. He started carrying change, and from there he learned to deal craps, became a pit supervisor, and finally rose to the position of a casino manager and later a general manager. As his life changed and opportunities for advancement presented themselves, Dwayne moved from one casino to another. The story of each casino and each job he held is a window into the history of casino gaming in Reno. It is especially instructive to compare the management of Harolds Club and Harrah's as he experienced them. Dwayne's career was only slightly different than most. He achieved a little more, reached a little higher. He became a part owner of the Silver Spur in downtown Reno, which to Dwayne was like getting to the World Series in baseball; it was the highest achievement possible.

The story of Dwayne Kling's career is the story of the people and the casinos of Reno in the second half of the twentieth century. In every aspect of his career there can be seen a man that respected his work, respected the people he worked with, and respected the industry that was his career. He showed by his example that his successes were not the result of luck but of planning and hard work. Dwayne Kling's oral history is an interesting and valuable addition to the literature on the history of gaming in Nevada.

(Continued on next page.)

Description (continued)

The reader is also directed to Dwayne Kling's book, *The Rise of the Biggest Little City: An Encyclopedic History of Reno Gaming 1931 to 1981*, and to UNOHP's *Every Light Was On*, the result of Dwayne's interviews with Harrah's Club employees. In these books you can see Dwayne's work ethic and his regard for history. In both works, his almost unbelievable attention to the details of history and his regard for each individual person's contribution to the history of gambling in Nevada is obvious.

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*From oral history interviews
conducted by Ken Adams
and edited by Dwayne Kling*

University of Nevada
Oral History Program

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LUCK IS THE RESIDUE OF DESIGN.
—BRANCH RICKEY

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PREFACE

SINCE 1965 the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) has been collecting an eyewitness account of Nevada's remembered past. While there is no standard chronicler profile nor rigid approach to interviewing, each oral history plumbs human memory to gain a better understanding of the past. Following the precedent established by Allan Nevins at Columbia University in 1948 (and perpetuated since by academic programs such as ours throughout the English-speaking world) these manuscripts are called oral histories. Some confusion surrounds the meaning of the term. To the extent that these "oral" histories can be read, they are not oral, and while they are useful historical sources, they are not themselves history. Still, custom is a powerful force; historical and cultural records that originate in tape-recorded interviews are almost uniformly labeled "oral histories," and our program follows that usage.

Oral histories conducted by UNOHP are meant to serve the function of primary source documents, as valuable in the process of historiography as the written records with which historians customarily work. However, while the properly conducted oral history is a reliable source, verifying the accuracy of all of the

statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the UNOHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made by Dwayne Kling, and that he has edited the transcript, but it does not assert that all statements are entirely free of error. As with all such efforts, the work should be approached with the same caution that the prudent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

Each finished manuscript is the product of a collaboration—its structure influenced by the directed questioning of an informed, well-prepared interviewer, and its articulation refined through editing. While the words in this published oral history are essentially those of Dwayne Kling in his interview with Ken Adams, the text is not a *verbatim* transcription of the interview as it occurred. In producing a manuscript, it is the practice of the UNOHP to employ the language of the chronicler, but to edit for clarity and readability. By shifting text when necessary, by polishing syntax, and by deleting or subsuming the questions of the interviewer, a first-person narrative with chronological and topical order is created. For the reader's convenience, the interviewer's questions have been set in italics, and a glossary of terms is provided.

The tape recordings from which this manuscript is derived are in the archives of the University of Nevada Oral History Program where they can be heard by appointment.

UNOHP
December 2000

INTRODUCTION

DWAYNE KLING'S CAREER is a story of hard work, a desire to be the best, and opportunity. Dwayne came to Nevada as a semi-pro baseball player, playing for Harrah's Club, in the summer of 1947. He was between his first and second year of college at St. Mary's when he came to Reno, and while that summer was his introduction to casinos, it was not his introduction to gambling. Even as a college student Dwayne liked to gamble, whether on a card game, a racehorse, or a presidential election. Even then, it was a source of income for him. He earned his spending money in college playing pinochle and booking bets on horse races.

In Reno and the casinos, Dwayne found a home. At the end of the summer (he actually played ball in Reno two summers), Dwayne went back to school to study business and play baseball. Indeed, baseball was the theme of the first twenty-five years of his life. He played baseball in grammar school, high school, college, and in the army. After school and the army, he played professional baseball in the Yankee farm system until 1954.

In 1954, Dwayne returned to Nevada, and the theme of the next forty years of his life was casino gaming. His plan was to be

a history teacher when he retired from baseball, and he took a job carrying change while he prepared for a teaching certificate. That job, carrying change on the graveyard shift at Harolds Club, turned into a career, and the history teacher in him had to wait another forty years. Of gambling as he saw it that first summer Dwayne said, "Gambling was fascinating . . . it was exciting . . . and I liked to play."

Dwayne took casinos and casino gambling as seriously as he had taken baseball and school. When he was in the lineup, Dwayne played to win, to be the best. In a way, his casino career was typical. He started carrying change, and from there he learned to deal craps, became a pit supervisor, and finally rose to the position of a casino manager and later a general manager. As his life changed and opportunities for advancement presented themselves, Dwayne moved from one casino to another. The story of each casino and each job he held is a window into the history of casino gaming in Reno. It is especially instructive to compare the management of Harolds Club and Harrah's as he experienced them. Dwayne's career was only slightly different than most. He achieved a little more, reached a little higher. He became a part owner of the Silver Spur in downtown Reno, which to Dwayne was like getting to the World Series in baseball; it was the highest achievement possible.

The process of the interviews was one that was uncommon for me. We would try and meet once a week for two to four hours of interviews. Once a week was a general rule, as a week between sessions gives the chronicler and the interviewer each time to review their previous work and prepare for the next session. Sessions are rarely ever longer than four hours, as even four hours can be very exhausting. Remembering, reliving, and recording a life is not always easy or automatic, and it requires effort by both parties. The complete process can require thirty to forty hours of interviewing.

Dwayne and I began each session with coffee, and a half hour of general conversation along with some discussion of the topics to be covered that day. Five or six sessions into the process, it seemed to me to be flowing as planned, but Dwayne was not typical of the people I had interviewed in the past. He had high

expectations, and he took the process very seriously. He believed that his story, if properly recorded, could help others understand and appreciate the history of gambling. In his mind, a problem had developed. Dwayne did not think I was taking him, his story, or the process as seriously as it deserved to be treated. He told me exactly that, and then asked me if I wanted to continue; because if I did, I would have to treat him with more respect than I had up to that point. If not, he was unwilling to continue. That was a very tense and embarrassing moment for me. Dwayne was right, I had been on autopilot; he and his story did deserve more respect. I agreed to give my full attention to the process and to his story, and I did my best to live up to that promise.

We continued the interviews and, as this text indicates, produced an interesting and valuable addition to the literature on the history of gaming in Nevada. I learned to really respect Dwayne and his contribution to the industry. I respected him because he confronted me, but more because in every aspect of his career there can be seen a man that respected his work, respected the people he worked with, and respected the industry that was his career. He showed me by his example that his successes were not the result of luck but of planning and hard work.

Dwayne Kling's sense of history is reflected in his book, *The Rise of the Biggest Little City: An Encyclopedic History of Reno Gaming 1931 to 1981*, and in *Every Light Was On*, the result of his interviews with Harrah's Club employees. You can see Dwayne's work ethic and his regard for history. In both works, his almost unbelievable attention to the details of history and his regard for each individual person's contribution to the history of gambling in Nevada is obvious. The story of Dwayne Kling's career is the story of the people and the casinos of Reno in the second half of the twentieth century. I hope the reader learns as much from Dwayne as I have.

KEN ADAMS
Reno, Nevada
December 2000

GROWING UP ON THE FARM: TURLOCK, CALIFORNIA

DWAYNE KLING: I was born in Turlock, California on September 4, 1929. My parents had come from Nebraska in 1928. I have four older brothers, but I'm the only one in my family that was born in California, and I am also the only one that was born in a hospital.

My parents' names were August Kling and Ruth Kling. Dad was a farmer all his life, and mom was a housewife. She never had any job, other than raising five kids and keeping house. [laughter]

My father had learned to farm from his dad. His dad, Fred Kling, was born in Sweden in 1854 and came to the United States in the 1860s. He homesteaded land in Illinois and also in Nebraska. My dad's mother, Hilda, was born in Sweden in 1863 and came to the United States in 1869. My dad was born in Mead, Nebraska in 1887 and grew up on a farm. Two of his brothers became dentists, but Dad didn't care to be a dentist. He always said he'd rather work outside than be confined to an office.

My mother was the daughter of a pharmacist. Her dad's name was John Jeppson, and he was born in Sweden in 1851. He came to Iowa in the 1860s and worked as a pharmacist, went to a

pharmacy college, graduated with a degree in pharmacy and ran a drugstore in Ottumwa, Iowa. In 1886 he moved to Mead, Nebraska and opened a pharmacy there. He operated that pharmacy until he died in 1938. My mom's mother, Emma, was born in Sweden in 1856 and came to the United States in the 1860s.

Mom was born in Mead, Nebraska in 1892, and she and my dad were married January 21, 1913, in Mead, Nebraska. Mom's sisters all went to college, and they were all teachers. Mom went to college, also, and she graduated from Luther College in Wahoo, Nebraska. She studied music and art. In fact, all through her life, she gave piano lessons to neighboring children, and she was the pianist, organist, and choir leader for our church.

My parents, especially my mom, were very religious. The church was a very important part of their lives. Dad was brought up as a very religious person, but then he had some unpleasant experiences in Nebraska in the church, and I don't know what they were. He never really did talk about them. He didn't go to church for probably the first eight or ten years that they lived in California. Then in the late 1930s, we had a new minister come to our church. He saw how involved Mom was in church, as far as teaching Sunday school, music, and other church activities, so he said



August and Ruth Kling on their wedding day, January 21, 1913.

to her a couple of times, “How come your husband never comes to church?”

She said, “Well, why don’t you go out to the farm and ask him?”

So Dr. Odell, the minister, went out to the farm where Dad was harrowing the field, and he said, “Do you have time to talk to me for a little bit?”

Dad said, “I don’t have time to talk to you. I’m busy now.” He said, “If you want to wait for about an hour, then I’ll talk to you.”

So the minister said, “OK,” and he waited. When Dad got done, the minister said, “I really think you should come to church,” or “Why don’t you come to church?” or something like that.

Dad said, “I work hard all week. I work six days a week, and I’m out here trying to make enough money to send my kids to school, earn enough money to feed them and buy them clothes.” He said, “I work six days, and on my seventh day,” he said, “I like to go fishing.”

The minister said, “Well, I’ll tell you what, if I take off Sunday and go fishing with you, will you go to church with me the next Sunday?”

Dad said, “Yes. OK. I’ll do that,” not figuring that the minister would do it. So the next Sunday the minister says that he’s not going to conduct service—he’s not going to be in church. So he comes out, and he and Dad go fishing. Now, Dad has been caught, he’s been put into the corner, so he says, “OK, I’ll go to church,” and from then on, he went to church every Sunday, plus, he went to other church activities. He and the minister wound up being good friends, and they fished together, they went to church together, and they traveled together.

As I said earlier, my parents moved to California in 1928. They came out to California in a brand new Model “A” Ford sedan. Of course, there was Mom and Dad and four kids. I wasn’t born yet.

My oldest brother’s name is Leon. He was born in January of 1914, just about a year after Mom and Dad were married. He worked as a California Highway Patrolman most of his life. He

started out in the Los Angeles area, and after World War II he worked in Modesto, California. He retired out of Modesto in 1969.

My next brother's name is Bill. Bill was born in June of 1920. He graduated from the University of California in 1941 with an accounting major. He was a CPA all his life, worked as a comptroller for a couple of trucking firms in the Bay Area. Bill retired many years ago, also. He lives in Twain Harte, California.

I have twin brothers, Ralph and Roger Kling. They were born in August of 1924. Roger graduated from the University of California, was a school teacher most of his life. Ralph graduated from San Jose State College, and he was also in the California school system all his life. He started out as teacher and coach and wound up being administrator. He was principal of a couple of high schools in the San Jose area.

Roger, the one that graduated from Cal, stayed on the home farm. My dad and mom had a forty-acre farm near Turlock, California, outside of a small town called Hilmar. We grew mainly corn, beans, and alfalfa. We had a small dairy farm. We had between ten and fourteen head of milk cattle, and we had around five hundred chickens. We had ten acres of grapes, and the grapes were the major revenue producer.



Dwayne with two of his brothers and a friend on the family farm. Back row, l. to r.: Ralph and Roger Kling. Front row, l. to r.: Ron Pooley and Dwayne.

After Dad retired from the farm, or got too old to farm, then my brother, Roger, stayed on the farm and leased most of it out while he was teaching elementary school. So one of my brothers was a California Highway Patrolman, one was a CPA, and two of them worked in the school system of California.

I was always kind of an embarrassment to Mom and Dad, because I was in gambling all my life. [laughter] I graduated from college, but I never got into what they considered a respectable profession. A lot of times when I would go back home and visit, I was introduced as the boy from Reno or the boy from Nevada. [laughter] They never said, "Well, he works in gambling." Never, "He does this and that in the gambling business." I was always "the boy from Nevada," or "the youngest son from Nevada."

KEN ADAMS: In 1928 when your family moved to California, did your father own a farm in Nebraska that he sold, and did they know where they were going to go?

My grandfather, my father's father, had come to California in 1920, and he brought one of my uncles with him and two of my aunts. He had retired and came to California with around fifty thousand dollars. He bought several forty-acre parcels around town, and he bought other real estate. One of those forty-acre parcels eventually became our family farm.

To the day he died, my father would not tell me how much he paid for that land. He said, "It just wouldn't be fair for me to tell you how much money I paid for that forty-acre farm." He said his brother Ed lived on a forty-acre farm, and everybody knew what Ed paid my grandpa for that land. Esther also lived on forty acres, not too far away from us. That was my dad's sister, my aunt. Everybody knew what she had to pay for her land. But when my dad came out here, he had four boys with him.

I finally figured this out by going back through land records and everything else after Dad died. He never would tell me, because I'd say, "Well, why don't you tell me? All these people are dead. Who knows, and who cares?"

He said, "I just won't tell you."



The Kling brothers at a 1995 family reunion. Back row, l. to r.: Roger and Dwayne. Front row, l. to r.: Leon, Bill, and Ralph. The family farmhouse is in the background.

So I finally tracked it down and found out that my grandfather *gave* him that land, and I figure the reason he gave him that land is because here comes my dad, August—they called him Augie—here comes Augie out to California with four kids and little, if any, money. So Grandpa Fred gave Dad that land, and I'm sure he did it out of sympathy for this guy trying to raise his kids.

All my brothers are married, and between the five of us we had ten children. My brothers, of course, are all retired now, and they're all still living. As far as the next generation is concerned there is no one that wants the farm or wants to live on the farm, and within this coming year, it will be sold.

Did your uncle and your aunt's farm sell, also?

Yes. All the parcels that my grandpa bought in 1920 have gone out of the family, one way or the other. When the folks came to

California, Mom wanted to live near Turlock, which at that time probably had a population of about three thousand people. She wanted to live close to town, because she was brought up in the small town of Mead, Nebraska. She wasn't used to living out on a farm, but this place that Dad picked out was twelve miles from Turlock. The reason he picked it is because it was very close to the Merced River, and the soil was very good. It was good, heavy, dark black soil, and it raised good crops. You got too far away from the river, and the soil was too sandy. Dad picked out the best piece of land. Mom wasn't too happy with it, but he was. [laughter]

He built the house with a little help from relatives, and I don't know how many square feet it has in it. We had three bedrooms. Two bedrooms for the boys and one bedroom for Mom and Dad. So we slept together a lot. When I was growing up, there was always a couple of kids in one of the beds, but my oldest brother was out of the house when I was five. My next brother started college in 1937, and Ralph and Roger were gone in 1942, so in a way, I was an only child, to a degree. Even having four brothers, I don't remember many of them around in the house that much.

October, 1929 is when the stock market crashed, so I grew up during the Depression. In one way, I was sheltered, because up to the age of six, seven, or eight years old, the big boys did all the heavy work, but everyone had a chore; everyone had a job. Until all of my brothers left, I didn't have to milk the cows or do any of the heavy field work. I didn't have to cut the alfalfa. I didn't have to rake the alfalfa and pick the corn or hoe the corn. A lot of those things I didn't have to do, because the baby brother, or the baby of the family, is probably spoiled more than anyone else in the family.

I had the easier jobs. I would haul the kindling into the house, and I usually picked the eggs and cleaned the eggs. You can imagine with five boys, it had to be pretty tough to feed and clothe those kids, and I remember my oldest brother telling me that in the 1930s, Dad was just making enough money to barely pay the taxes on the property. I don't know what the taxes would have been at that time, but milk was selling for five cents a gallon. So we would sell a ten-gallon can of milk and maybe get fifty cents. Eggs were selling for only three or four cents a dozen. So there was

hardly any cash flow at all. The milk and eggs were really our only source of revenue, because the grapes hadn't matured enough to sell. We didn't sell the first crop of grapes probably until 1939 or 1940.

Besides the five hundred chickens and the ten and fourteen cows, we didn't have any animals, except work horses. Dad didn't like pigs. [laughter] Dad thought pigs were ugly, dirty animals. He thought they were smelly and messy, and he wouldn't have a pig on the farm.

We had a huge barn. And the barn was used mainly for storing the alfalfa for the cows and the horses. The cows, of course, came in the barn when you were milking them. Otherwise, they were out in the corral. It would get rainy and muddy there in the wintertime, and the cow corrals and the horse corrals would get very muddy and full of water. I don't know why Dad always let the horses in the barn, but the cows always had to stay out in the rain. Of course, the chickens would automatically come into the chicken houses to get away from the rain.

One of my chores was to pick the eggs, and sometimes the chickens would be a little feisty. You'd reach under there to get those eggs, and they'd turn around and peck at you. They did keep the nests fairly clean. For some reason, they did most of their droppings away from the nest, but you did run into that problem on occasion. The chickens had a huge roosting area, and the big job that everybody hated was to clean the chicken coop, because to clean up all those droppings and work in those chicken houses was a dirty, smelly, messy job.

After I picked the eggs I always had to clean them. In the wintertime, when they had been outside walking around in that mud and then come in and sit on their nests, they would get mud and dirt all over the eggs. So before you could pack them in the egg crates for the egg producer, you had to have them nice and clean. So that was another one of my jobs—sitting there cleaning the eggs and putting them in the egg crates.

There was always a shortage of money. We ate a lot of what they called Depression meals. We ate a *lot* of potatoes. We didn't grow that many potatoes, and I don't know why. We grew a lot of

tomatoes around the house, and we grew a lot of corn, eating corn, as well as corn for the animals, and fruit was abundant. We didn't have that many fruit trees on our property. In fact, we had very few, but we were surrounded by melon farms and fruit farms of all kinds: apricots, peaches, watermelons. We had all the fruit that we needed. Of course, Mom canned everything. We'd have pantries full of canned tomatoes, canned peaches, canned apricots, canned cherries—anything you can think of, as far as canned goods were concerned, and Mom put all that up. We didn't grow potatoes. I can remember going into town and Dad buying a hundred-pound bag of potatoes. We ate a lot of macaroni. We ate a lot of meat loaf. We ate a lot of tomato soup. Of course, we drank a lot of milk. Mom would mix the milk and tomatoes together to make soup, and that was your main meal, just that bowl of soup—that bowl of tomato soup.

In the morning we always had hot cereal. There was no such thing as buying Kellogg's cornflakes or Wheaties. When I was young, for breakfast you *always* had a bowl of hot cereal. Every day of the year, you had a bowl of hot cereal. Then, beside that, you would have things like eggs. We ate a lot of eggs, of course. So the eggs and milk furnished a lot of our food. We always had a big, heavy breakfast. Working on the farm, you would always get up about two hours before breakfast and milk the cows and do certain chores: feed the chickens, feed the horses, and things of that nature. You always did that before breakfast. Then you'd come in and have breakfast about seven, seven-thirty. During the school year you'd get ready and go to school, but during the summer, there were always jobs to be done outside, and Dad was a hard-working kind of guy, so he needed a lot of food to keep him going.

The noon meal was the biggest meal of the day, and it was called dinner. The evening meal was called supper. At noon Mom would always have lots of potatoes and gravy. The meats were few and far between, but we did eat some ground round and a lot of chicken. I never did do this—I never had enough guts to do it—but Mom and Dad and all my brothers would go out there and pick a rooster to eat. They would just go out there and grab that rooster. We had a big chopping block in the yard, and they just put

that rooster on that chopping block, and they'd chop his head off. Then Mom would take him in and pull the feathers out and clean him. So we ate a lot of chicken.

We didn't raise any beef to eat. I don't know why Dad didn't do that. Most of the neighbors did. Sometimes we would buy meat from the neighbors after they had slaughtered cattle. We would buy pork, too. Like I said, Dad didn't want any pigs on the farm, but when one of the neighbors would butcher a pig, then we would share in that.

My Dad was a very, very quiet man. A very quiet man. I've worked with my dad out in the field for three or four hours without a word being exchanged between the two of us. We were, for some reason, almost in awe of my father, although he was never mean to us, never harsh, and he only hit me once in his life, that I remember, but we were always in fear of him, a respectful fear. I remember when I was sixteen and got my license to drive a car, I did not dare ask my father to use the car. If I wanted to go out on a date or go to a school function, I was afraid to ask my dad if I could use the car. I'd have to go to my mom and then say, "Mom, I'd like to borrow the car."

Then *she* would go to Dad and say, "Dwayne wants to use the car tonight."

He'd mumble and grumble and say, "Well, yes. OK." Then he'd call me in and say, "Now listen, you be home by ten o'clock, and you don't drive too fast," and this and that—you know, a strict set of orders, but he would *never*—never in his entire life—come to me and say, "You want to use the car tonight, Dwayne?" He knew every time I came home from college on the weekends, and he knew a lot of times in high school that I wanted to use the car, but he never offered me the car once. In conjunction with the fact that he never offered me the car, he also never turned me down when I asked for the car.

Did your dad have firm beliefs and, if so, how did you know what his beliefs were?

Just by listening. He would talk to the neighbors. In those days the biggest form of entertainment was having people over for

dinner. Neighboring people would come over once a week, or vice versa—you'd go over to their house. They were potluck dinners where everyone brings a dish of something, and you put it together, and you all sit around and eat and visit. There was a group of people, probably about seven or eight couples, that got together almost weekly, and Dad always controlled those conversation groups. [laughter] He was more adamant and talked louder than the rest of them. He would express his beliefs so much firmer than the other people that he almost always carried the discussion.

One thing he was very firm about was Americans speaking the English language. There were a lot of Japanese in the area, and most of them spoke Japanese only, and that really bothered Dad. There were a few Greek families that lived around us, and they spoke Greek; that bothered Dad. [laughter] And there were Portuguese—more Portuguese than anyone. They always spoke Portuguese, and that really bugged Dad. Dad grew up speaking only Swedish in his house. In fact, I have a grandfather that's listed in the 1900 census as being unable to read or write English, and speaking the Swedish language only. Dad and Mom both grew up knowing how to speak Swedish, in fact, living in homes where Swedish was spoken, but he was a firm believer that when you're in the United States, you speak English. You don't speak any other language. It always bothered him to think people would speak those other languages. He was very strong on *that*, and so none of his children—my brothers or myself—none of us speaks Swedish. It would have been nice if we'd have been able to speak it, but, you know, when you're in America, you speak American.

There was very little conversation at the table. Mom would try and start a conversation, but Dad very seldom had anything to say. Mom would generate conversation with the boys about school things or baseball games or athletic things or classes. Mom was pretty lively as far as keeping the conversation going, but, to me, it was amazing, like I said, to spend three to four hours out in the field with Dad, with nothing at all said.

Jumping ahead of the story just a little bit, but to illustrate the point, in the summer of 1947, I was offered a chance to come to Reno to play semi-pro baseball, and I dreaded asking Dad. I was

afraid to ask him, because both Mom and Dad did not like gambling. Well, I'd come home from college, and Dad and I were out cleaning the chicken coops, and we had been cleaning them in complete silence for at least an hour. All that time I'm thinking, "I got to ask Dad if I can play baseball." And I just kept putting it off and putting it off, and finally, I almost blurted it out. I said, "You know, Dad, I got a chance to go play baseball in Reno. Would you let me go?"

Almost immediately, he said, "Will you get to play a lot of baseball up there?"

I said, "Oh, yes. We're supposed to play at least three or four games a week."

He said, "Well, is it a pretty good league up there?"

I said, "Yes, there's going to be a lot of good baseball players going there." He was very enthused about it. One thing that he always did back me on was my love of baseball. He always tried to encourage me to get into it. He *followed* me in baseball more than he did any of the rest of the brothers, but our conversations were very limited.

In the evenings, did you do anything as a family? Did you sit around and read, talk, play games, listen to the radio?

We always listened to the radio together. Dad had a Morris chair that he sat in, and that was Dad's chair. Dad sat there, and we listened to whatever Dad wanted to listen to, unless we went in the other room. I don't remember at what time in my life, but probably when I was eight or nine years old, Mom got a radio and put it in the kitchen. The big radio was in the living room, but there was a small radio in the kitchen, and sometimes the boys would go in the kitchen and turn the radio on and listen to what we wanted to listen to. Dad did like listening to the radio, and his favorite program was a program called *Fibber McGee and Molly*. It used to be on at about seven o'clock or seven thirty at night. That was a *must* program. You had to listen to *Fibber McGee and Molly*. Well, for some reason, they changed the time of *Fibber McGee*, and it came on earlier in the evening. It came on when we were out milking the cows. So Dad made this major decision.

[laughter] He bought a radio to put in the barn, and if you turned it up really loud, you could hear *Fibber McGee and Molly*, or whatever was on, when you were milking the cows. Of course, we listened to it the other six days of the week, also, but what precipitated a radio going in the barn was the *Fibber McGee and Molly* show.

When I was twelve years old, my brothers were *all* gone, so I don't remember the five boys being around together that much, at all. In 1942 when they were all in the service, in the summertime Mom and Dad and I used to walk down to the Merced River, which was probably about a half a mile away from us. We fished there almost every night for probably two or three months in a row during those summers of 1942, 1943, and 1944. We'd fish for catfish and perch, and we'd always catch a bunch of catfish. In the summer evenings, after we'd get the cows milked, we'd walk down to the river, and we'd fish until dark. We always came home with quite a few catfish and perch. In fact, we ate so many of them that I don't really care for fish to this day.

Then in the fall, the salmon used to come up the Merced and spawn. They were big silver salmon, anywhere from twenty to forty pounds. Dad would go fishing early every morning. I don't know why he had to go early in the morning. I guess that's when they were moving up stream or something, but I always had to go with him. [laughter] Dad liked to fish, and I thought, "I don't like to fish," but I'd stand there and fish next to Dad for an hour, or so, even before I'd go to school. We'd have to milk the cows early, and we'd go down there and stand by that river and try to catch those salmon, and it was cold. It wasn't cold like Reno, but it was in the thirties. Your fingers would get wet and icy and cold, and we were fishing and fishing. I thought, "You know, I don't really like to do this at all," but I never told Dad I didn't like to fish. [laughter]

He would just say, "Come on, we're going down fishing." Well, the windup is, we'd catch those fish, and Mom would smoke the salmon. Mom would can the salmon. Mom would roast the salmon. She would freeze the salmon. We would eat fresh salmon. Probably, from October until March or April, we would eat salmon three or four times a week, either frozen, smoked, or canned. They used to can them a lot. Of course, that was a major benefit

to our grocery budget—getting those salmon. Mom froze a lot of the salmon, because we had a freezer in our house. In the town of Hilmar which was six miles away, they had frozen-food lockers. People would rent lockers, and you could put all your frozen fish or meat in the locker. Then when you'd go into Hilmar, you'd pick up your frozen items and bring them home to your small freezer. So fishing was another example of doing things, not for fun, but because you needed food to live on.

Did your brothers teach you how to do things?

Well, as I said, my brothers left so early that I didn't really learn that much from them. I patterned myself after them, to a degree, because, being in a small community and attending a small school, they were all well-known. All of them were good students and good athletes. The Kling family had a good reputation. When I was growing up, my brothers were president of the Luther League or secretary of the youth group, and it was expected that I would also do that. As I grew up through grammar school and high school, it was *expected* that I would be an athlete and become a leader.

I learned more from my mom than anybody. Mom loved to read, and I loved to read. I used to read continually. The library was almost six miles away from us, but as long as I can remember, I always had library books around the house. The school that I went to had a library, but only in the big room. I went to a two-room school house, and there were four grades in the little room and four grades in the big room. In the big room they had what I thought then was a sizeable library, but it probably didn't have any more books than I have in my house, right now. [laughter] The first through fourth grades were in the little room, and fifth grade through the eighth grade were in the big room. I was the only kid my age allowed in the big room, because I had read all the books in the little room. So I was a reader, and I learned that from Mom.

Mom read all the time. She read novels—light novels—nothing real heavy-duty, or anything. She just read a lot. She

studied art in college, but she didn't paint much after she married Dad. However, she stayed active in music all her life.

Earlier, I was talking about Dad following me in baseball. Well, the four older boys say that he didn't attend their games and didn't follow them in their sports activities, and the only reason I can figure is that he was working too hard then. He was too busy. He had *five* kids at home, and he was working hard trying to make a living. When I got into baseball, even back at the age of thirteen and fourteen, he would travel thirty miles to Modesto, which was a long ways to travel in the 1940s. He would travel thirty miles to see a baseball game. He came to a great deal of my high school games, and he drove to St. Mary's College when I played there. When I signed to play as a professional, he always subscribed to the newspaper from the city where I was playing. If I was playing in Boise, he'd get the Boise newspaper. If I was playing in Wisconsin, he'd get the Wisconsin paper. Canada, or wherever I was playing, he always subscribed to the paper. Sometimes he'd stay up late at night, and from this little town of Hilmar, he could hear radio broadcasts out of Montana and Idaho, and a few times he was lucky enough to get to hear my baseball games on the radio. He *loved* it when I went to spring training with the Yankees and knew Casey Stengel. He used to say, "Oh, my boy knows Casey." [laughter] He just thought that was great. So he followed me that way.

He was *proud* of his boys. He was always proud of all the kids, but I think he had trouble showing his emotion to his family. He always worked so hard to get things done and get them done right. It's like that Mac Davis song, *Stop And Smell The Roses*. I think Dad never took the time, or felt that he had the time, to smell the roses. He missed a lot. I think that's, maybe, why he got on with me more as he grew older.

Did he read in the evenings?

He always read the newspaper. I don't recall my dad ever reading a book, and he wrote, practically, *not* at all. My mom would write to the family that she'd left in Nebraska. Mom would write to her sisters, and she would write to all the boys when we

were in school or in the service. Mom always wrote. I don't recall ever getting a letter from my dad. When my oldest daughter got married, he couldn't come to the wedding—he was too old. So he wrote her a letter wishing her a happy marriage and a good life. I told Michelle, my oldest daughter, "Well, you got something from my dad that I never got. You got a letter." So he didn't express himself much that way.

He was very interested in news, very interested in politics, very interested in the war, very interested in all kinds of current events. He subscribed only to magazines such as the *Country Gentleman* and the *Farm Journal*. We did get *Colliers* and *Saturday Evening Post*, but Mom mostly read those. He would read them, if there was a non-fiction article on current events.

Did he play solitaire or do something in the evening before he went to bed?

No. He would read the newspaper, listen to the radio, and go to bed. He had a chess game always available in the house, but I never saw him play chess. He never taught *me* how to play chess. To the best of my knowledge, he never taught any of my brothers to play chess. The chess game was there, but never used. I remember sitting around the dining room table with my mom and my brothers when I was very young and playing Monopoly. Dad would never join in the Monopoly games. We had a few other games that we played, but I *never* remember him playing at all.

Did he go to town and have a drink, or go play checkers with the boys?

Never. He told me once, "I never had a drink of hard liquor in my life." [laughter] The only thing he ever did with "the boys" was go fishing. He never hunted. Did not like hunting, did not like to shoot animals, did not like to hurt anything. I think that's possibly one reason why we didn't slaughter our own cattle on the farm.

He'd go into town maybe once a week. He used to go into Turlock, because there weren't enough big stores in Hilmar. He

would take Mom to Turlock every Saturday in the morning, but he had to be home by noon, so he could work in the afternoon.

Did they talk very much to each other, your parents? Did they seem to get along well?

They seemed to get along all right. The funny thing is—and my wife Rose and I joked about this a few times—they always talked more in bed than anywhere else. I remember when I was a kid you could hear Mom and Dad sit in there and talk. They would talk mostly about what the boys did or what happened in school, but me being the youngest one, I probably heard more of it than anybody else. I would hear them discussing what my brother Ralph and his wife Irene did, or what my brother Leon and his wife Elsie did, or what they didn't do. They would talk in bed a lot, but I don't remember them ever having a lot of conversations between the two of them when I was around. In later years, my wife Rose and I would go down and visit them, and we could still hear them talking in the bedroom about what Rose looked like, or what Rose did, or what we said, or what our daughters, Michelle or Connie or Debbie, did, or who they looked like, or what they wore. They seemed to have long conversations in bed, and that's really the only conversations I remember them having.

How old were your parents when they died?

Dad died in 1979, and Mom died in 1976. He was ninety-two, and she was eighty-four. So they lived a long life. They had strict beliefs and strict principles, as far as honesty and hard work were concerned.

Who communicated those to you? Who told you what was right and wrong?

Dad led by example. He would make few comments, but I got the hard work example from Dad. We just had a wood stove, and he would get up and get the stove lit and get the fire going and

warm the house up a little bit in the wintertime, and *then* he would come and wake you up. In the summertime, of course, he would always get up and get started, but then he'd come in and get me up or get the brothers up. It was never, "Oh, gee, let's take the day off," or "Gee, let's go fishing today." The only time you did anything like that was when you had all your work done, and you worked as long as there was work to do, or as long as you could see. So the hard work ethic definitely came from my dad. You never questioned Dad. If Dad said, "We're going to do the hay today," or "We're going to pick the grapes," you just did it. He didn't order you to do anything. He just said this is what we're going to do, and that's what we did.

How big was your father?

Oh, about my size. He was about six-foot tall, and he weighed around about one hundred seventy-five, one hundred eighty all his life. Mom was tall for a lady, in those days. She was about five-foot eight, probably weighed one hundred thirty-five, one hundred forty pounds. Of course, you can figure how hard a worker she would have to be to feed and take care of, basically, six men—five boys and Dad.

Did you have to help your mom when you were young?

I helped a lot when the bigger guys were working out in the fields. I probably helped Mom more than any of them. I did a lot of the clothes washing and hanging the clothes up on the line. We never had a clothes dryer. It was a major disappointment when I was born. They wanted a girl in the worst way, especially Mom. She would have *really* liked to have had a girl for a lot of reasons, but also to help out around the house. It was really too bad she didn't have a daughter. It would have been nice for her. Ironically, although she didn't have any daughters, she had ten grandchildren, and eight of them were girls. So she got a lot of girls that way, finally. So I was the boy that never was the girl, and I *did* help out around the house a lot.

FIRST CAREER:
PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL

WOULD YOU TELL us what your brothers did in sports that led you to become involved in athletics?

Well, as I've said, I have four brothers. Brother Bill had an arm injury and never was able to participate in sports that much, but my oldest brother Leon played football, basketball, and baseball. He was the only one my dad let play football, and he hurt himself a little bit, so none of the rest of the boys played football. My twin brothers, Ralph and Roger, who are five years older than I am, were stars in basketball and baseball in high school. They set a pattern for me or helped me set goals, because I wanted to play on the baseball teams and the basketball teams like they did and be just as good as they were or better than they were. So I always had an interest in athletics, even in grammar school.

I started playing baseball in the fifth grade in grammar school, and, of course, there wasn't anything like little league or Babe Ruth baseball. It was strictly unorganized baseball. When I went to high school I made the varsity baseball team my freshman year. I played four years of varsity baseball in high school, and I played three years of varsity basketball in high school. My high school

baseball coach was also my history teacher. His name was Gene McSweeney. He had graduated from St. Mary's College in California, which is located in Moraga, California, just outside of Oakland. He thought that I was a good enough baseball player to warrant a baseball scholarship to St. Mary's College. So in my senior year he drove me up to St. Mary's College and introduced me to the president of the college and to the coach of the baseball team, Johnny Vergez. Vergez was a former major-league baseball player who had also managed Oakland and Sacramento in the Pacific Coast League. The interesting thing to me, looking back on it, was that no one had me even try out. Vergez had never seen me play, and strictly on the word of my high school coach, St. Mary's College awarded me a baseball scholarship. So after I graduated from high school, I started St. Mary's College in the fall of 1946.

I played third base almost my entire career. Played hundreds and hundreds of games in my life, and, other than probably twenty-five of them, I was on third base in every one. After my freshman year in high school I was recruited to play for the Modesto American Legion baseball team. Modesto is about thirty miles away from our farm. We had played Modesto in baseball, and the coach had seen me play.

Did your defensive skills or your batting catch his eye?

Actually, I was pretty good at both of them, in those days. [laughter] In later years, my glove became more potent than my bat, but in high school I was a good fielder and a good hitter, a good high-school hitter. When we played Modesto in a high-school game, the American Legion coach had seen me play, and he took a liking to my hitting and my fielding, both.

In 1942, 1943, 1944, and 1945 gas was rationed, and my dad didn't have enough ration stamps for the sixty-mile round trip. [laughter] He always encouraged my baseball, but he said, "I just don't have enough gas to be driving back and forth to take you to Modesto." So he said to the Modesto coach, "If you want Dwayne to play for you, you're going to have to come down and get him." So the coach, Jack Crouch, used to—every time we had a practice

or, of course, every time we had a ball game—drive the sixty-mile round trip to come and get me.

I was the starting third baseman on that team, and we beat all the neighboring cities. We beat Stockton, Lodi, Turlock, and we wound up playing Sacramento for the northern California championship of American Legion baseball. It was a two-out-of-three series, and we won the series. We won two of them two to one, and we lost one of them two to one. I had a great series in that Modesto-Sacramento series: scored two runs in the final game, got several hits, and made some good plays on the field. It was also my first exposure to professional baseball, because sitting in the stands that day was a fellow named Charles Walgren, who was the West Coast representative of the Boston Red Sox baseball team. He had come to watch about three guys on our team and a couple of guys from the Sacramento team. He didn't come to watch me, specifically, but I did have a great series that weekend. After the ball game, he came down and talked to me and my dad about signing professionally someday, even though I'd just finished one year of high school. It was a long ways from being legally able to talk to me, but I had such a good series that I caught Charlie Walgren's eye, and Charlie scouted me throughout my career.

After we defeated Sacramento, we took a train to Long Beach, California. We played the Long Beach team for the championship of the state of California, and, unfortunately, we lost two out of three to Long Beach. So the season ended there.

Was the rest of your high school career as memorable?

No. I played American Legion baseball the next two years for the same team, and the coach came down and got me for every game for both those years. We had good teams the other years, but not quite as good as the one in 1944. We did play for the northern California championship one year and lost. So my peak year in high school was when I was thirteen and played for the championship of the state of California.

Was your high school team a good team?

The high school team was an OK team. We never won any championships. We played in towns such as Gustine, Newman, Escalon, Turlock, Livingston, all the neighboring towns. There wasn't a lot of competition there. I was always on the all-star team, and I, usually, either led our team in batting or was close to it. I was captain of the team the last two years in high school, and I got a great deal of exposure in baseball, between high school and American Legion baseball. I graduated from Hilmar High School in 1946, and that's when Coach McSweeney took me up to St. Mary's College.

I started college in the fall of 1946. World War II, of course, ended in Japan in August of 1945, however, most of the returning veterans didn't get a chance to get started in college until the fall of 1946, the same time I did. So our freshman class was composed more of World War II veterans than it was of high school kids, like myself. They brought twenty-six of us in on baseball scholarships that year, which is a tremendous amount of guys to bring in for baseball scholarships, but St. Mary's was very heavy in athletics at that time. St. Mary's had given scholarships to several veterans that had played in high school and played in the service and had a lot more experience than I did. Plus, there was an all-city third baseman from San Francisco, who was my main competition. They had brought in two third basemen on scholarships, which was unusual. I knew I was going to have to beat out the best of the best from San Francisco. There were all-city kids from Oakland, Sacramento, and Los Angeles, and I was really intimidated when we started practice in early February of 1947, but I just played myself right into the starting line-up. I beat the kid out that was all-city San Francisco and made the starting varsity team at St. Mary's as a freshman, and there weren't many freshman on the team.

Did you have to make the varsity to keep your scholarship?

Yes. In those days, you did. I don't know if it's that way now or not, but if I hadn't, at least, made the traveling squad and done pretty well, I would have lost my scholarship. The fellow that I beat out from San Francisco lost his scholarship, as did other

people, but I wasn't looking at it monetarily-wise at all. I wasn't concerning myself about the scholarship. I just wanted to make the team. [laughter]

But your parents had resisted the idea of you going to St. Mary's, because it was a Catholic school?

Correct.

And the argument that won them over was the fact you would get a full-ride scholarship, right?

Correct. My folks were—especially my mom—very staunch Lutherans, and there is a lot of opposition between Lutherans and Catholics, of course. Even some of my aunts and uncles got into it, “Dwayne shouldn't be going to a Catholic college.” But a college education in those days, of course, was worth just as much, if not more, than it is now. So St. Mary's College paid for my board and room, my tuition, and all my books. It basically didn't cost my dad anything to send me to school, other than the few dollars that he would give me for spending money, on occasion. So, naturally, the financial end of the argument wound up winning, and I attended St. Mary's College.

Did you have to play baseball well enough to make the team every year, in order to keep your scholarship?

That's right.

Did the St. Mary's team have a good record?

No, we never had a really good winning record. My senior year we had a fairly good record, but we never had any great teams when I was at St. Mary's. One of the reasons was that out of the twenty-six that came in on scholarships as a freshman, only three of us completed four years of school and graduated. Most of the fellows that were brought in were highly regarded professional prospects, and they signed professional contracts and left school.

So the baseball scouts were attending all the college games?

Yes. I doubt if I ever played a college game that there weren't anywhere from three to six baseball scouts in the stands. The only reason there might be less is because California and Stanford might be playing the same day that St. Mary's was playing Santa Clara. So they would split their action, depending on who they wanted to watch the most, but we always had scouts out there.

In my first year at St. Mary's, we played in the best ball parks available. When we played in San Francisco we would play at Seals Stadium, which was a triple-A park, top-of-the-minor-league farm systems in those days. We played in the Coast League parks in San Francisco, Oakland, and Sacramento. When we would travel to Los Angeles, we would play in Wrigley Field. In Hollywood we would play at Gilmore Field.

Did you get good crowds?

A big crowd, for us, would be five thousand people. When we played at home at St. Mary's, we didn't have that much of a seating capacity, and so we would play lesser teams there. We might play somebody like Sonoma State or San Francisco State.

Where is St. Mary's?

St. Mary's is located in Moraga, California. It's about fifteen miles from Oakland, California, near Walnut Creek, Orinda, and Lafayette, in that area.

How big was St. Mary's?

When I entered, it had about a thousand students. It was an all-male college. We lived in dormitories, but there were a lot of kids that went to St. Mary's that commuted from Oakland, San Francisco, Walnut Creek, and nearby areas.

What was your major?

I majored in business administration and economics. Although sometimes, looking back on it, I think I majored in baseball and pinochle, because I spent as much time playing baseball and pinochle as I did studying, which was almost my downfall. [laughter]

Did baseball cut into your studying?

It did, yes. It really did. Every day that we didn't have a game, we would have practice, and practice would start no later than three o'clock. If you got out of classes at two, you went out at a little after two and started practicing, and you would practice until at least 5:30. We had to quit at 5:30 to go in and eat, because we all ate in the same mess hall.

Was it an athletic dormitory you were in?

No, we stayed in a regular dormitory. During baseball season we did eat at an athletic training table, so we got different food. In those days, it was a big deal to eat steaks, so the athletes all ate steaks. During football season, the football players would sit at the athletic table and eat steak. Whoever was in season got to eat at the training table. [laughter] The athletes always did get better food during their particular season.

You ate a steak every day?

Just about, yes. [laughter] They would vary it some days, but it was usually steak every day, and you always got extra milk and extra food. If you were just a regular student going through the chow line, you got whatever they put on your tray, and that was it, but we got a little extra special treatment.

What was it like being in an all-male school?

If I had to do it all over again, I would prefer a co-educational school. [laughter] I didn't really care for it that much. I think you miss out on a lot.

Where did you see girls?

Well, they had what they called mixers, and there were several all-girl colleges in the area. Oakland and San Francisco had about five colleges that were strictly for girls, and they used to come out to our campus. Other than that, the first couple of years I'd go home on the weekends and go out with girls that I'd gone with in high school.

When did you start to think that you were going to be a major league baseball player?

Probably when I was eleven or twelve years old. Before I got into high school, I just *knew* I was going to be a major league ball player. I loved the New York Yankees, and I knew I was going to play major league baseball for the New York Yankees. I just had to go through certain time frames in my life. I had to go to high school and play baseball and get experience there. Then I had to go to college and get a college education, so that when I was done playing baseball, I could become a history teacher. These things were set so firmly in my mind that I just *knew* I was going to do that. By knowing it, I possibly didn't try as hard as I should have.

It was just automatic to you?

It was a given.

You weren't going to have to do anything extra? It was just going to happen?

It was going to happen. I made the all-star team in grammar school. I made the varsity as a freshman in high school. I made all-league all through high school. The last couple of years of high school it just came too easy for me. I would be the leading hitter. I would get the base hit that would win the game. In the summertime I would play on championship teams. It was just a passage that I was going through, and I was progressing right along. Just everything was just really rolling my way. [laughter]

The scouts liked me, and they wanted to sign me before I got out of college. I thought no, because I'll get more money when I get out of college, and I want to finish my education because I plan to be a history teacher.

You said that one of the other games you played in college was pinochle.

Yes, that was how I earned my spending money. Pinochle was a popular game at St. Mary's. During baseball season we always took a couple of train trips to southern California. We'd take one trip where we'd go down and play USC and maybe Loyola, and then a month or so later, we'd take a trip where we'd play UCLA and Pepperdine. We always played pinochle on the train trips. We just played for a penny a point, or something like that—no major amount of money—but it was always an enjoyable game to play. I always had a lot of luck and a little bit of skill, or vice versa. [laughter] I always made spending money playing pinochle in college, and we did play a little bit of blackjack, too, in college.

Did you just learn to play in college?

Yes. I had never played before. As I mentioned earlier, my parents were very religious, and we didn't play card games at home. I learned to play cards when I got to St. Mary's.

Blackjack was a minor game you didn't play very much?

Right. We played it a little bit, and jumping ahead a little bit, of course, I wound up coming to Reno after my freshman year and sophomore year in college. So I learned more about blackjack at that time. It was, of course, blackjack; it wasn't twenty-one.

Is there a difference between blackjack and twenty-one?

Not really. The only difference between blackjack and twenty-one is who deals. If you were dealt a blackjack, you either won the deal, or you were paid double. In other words, if I had fifty cents

bet and got a blackjack, you would either pay me a dollar, or I could take the deal and be the dealer; it was my choice. Usually, the only reason you didn't take the deal was because you didn't have enough money to bankroll the game.

So, if you literally earned your spending money in college by playing cards, it means you must have played cards quite a bit.

Played cards probably much more than I should have.
[laughter]

Did you play every day?

Oh, no. Probably not every day, but quite frequently. You didn't need much spending money; some days you didn't spend anything. Sometimes you spent fifty cents or a dollar. You'd go to the school store and buy a milk shake on your break or buy a paper in the morning. A dollar a day was a big expenditure. So to make your spending money, it wasn't like you were winning that much money.

We had a scheduled study period every weeknight between seven and nine. You had to be in your room studying, and a Christian Brother would come to your room and check to see that you and your roommate were in your room, and that you were studying. Then you had a break between nine and ten. You had that free time when you could go out. You couldn't leave the campus, but you could go down to the store and buy a milk shake, or something, but then at ten o'clock you had to be in your room. Between 10:00 and 10:20 they'd come by your room to see if you were in bed or in your room. They didn't care if you were in bed, but you had to be in your room. So, oftentimes, we would wait until they'd come by and check the room, and then one or the other of us would sneak down to someone else's room and play pinochle for an hour, or so, instead of studying. [laughter] So it hurt my studies that way, but there were quite a few pinochle players in school.

Did the school know it?

Not really, no. If they came in the room and caught you playing pinochle, or out of your room during that seven to nine study period, they would chastise you severely. They'd talk to you and say you can't do that again. There were a few kids that got kicked out of school, not necessarily for playing pinochle, but for not being in their rooms when they should be, or a bunch of guys hanging out in one room. Eventually, you would get kicked out of school, if you weren't in your room when you were supposed to be.

My second year in college I roomed with a fellow named Mafeo Roman. We called him "Moff". Moff was a navy veteran from World War II, and he was probably about twenty-two years of age at that time. His home was in San Mateo, so he would live five days in the dormitory and then go home to San Mateo on the weekend. During the summertime and on Saturdays he worked as a ticket seller at the two big racetracks in the Bay area: Golden Gate Fields in Albany, and Tanforan in San Francisco. Well, Moff came up with the idea that we should have a horse book in our room. They used to have live broadcasts of the horse races on radio station KYA in San Francisco, and they would give the odds on the horses. So we started booking the races. There were probably about twenty to thirty college kids that would bet on the horses. Some days, about eight or ten kids would come in the room at one time, and a lot of the time they'd bet just certain races. They'd come in and bet a couple of races and then leave after that. But we booked all the horse races there were. We took any action that anybody wanted to give us, but we had small limits. We limited the bets from ten cents to a dollar. A dollar was the most you could bet, and we paid off true track odds. We made fairly good money on it for awhile. Nothing spectacular, I mean, but fairly good money. Two, three dollars apiece would be our end of it on an average day.

Do you remember what your bankroll was?

Whatever we had in our pocket. [laughter] Never was too much.

You didn't have a bankroll set aside for the races?

No, we had no bankroll set aside. We just paid out of our pocket. Some days, if I were broke, Moff would pay it all, or if he were broke, I'd pay it all, and we'd work it out later. That went along good for a couple of months in September and October. Guys would come in the room, and half of them or more were smoking in those days, and there was dirty ashtrays, and the wastebaskets were full of trash and debris and cigarette butts. So we used to give the janitor on our floor an extra dollar to come in and clean our room up after everybody left. [laughter]

In November of 1948 Harry Truman ran against Tom Dewey for the presidency of the United States, and Tom Dewey was the prohibitive favorite to win the election. It was common knowledge that Tom Dewey was a fifteen-to-one favorite to win the presidential election, so Moff and I thought well, we'll book the presidential election. How can you go wrong? Fifteen to one is a good bet. I don't recall how much we wound up booking, but a fellow named Al Beasley was the heaviest better. He probably bet five dollars on the election. He figured fifteen to one, how can you go wrong? Even if you lose, it's a good bet. Of course, the end of the story is that, if you lose, it's not a good bet. [laughter] The only bet that's any good is a winning bet. We had very little money on Dewey, and we had all that money on Truman, and Truman, of course, pulled an upset and won the election. So we paid out quite a bit of money, over a hundred dollars on the election, and that wiped out our bookmaking. We didn't even take horse-race bets after that, but it was a learning point in my life. [laughter] You got to have a bigger bankroll, or you got to make sure you win the right bets.

After I finished my first baseball season at St. Mary's, I was contacted by Charlie Walgren, the Boston Red Sox scout who had first seen me play in Modesto. He had followed me through high school and my first year of college. He was acquainted with a fellow named Al Lansdon who lived here in Reno. Al has passed away now, but Al was quite active in baseball in the Reno area. He was managing a baseball team for Harrah's Club. Harrah's Club had a semi-pro baseball team, as did Harolds Club, Nevada Turf Club, and Vaughn Lumber Mill. There were about five or six town teams, plus there were teams in Lovelock, Carson City, Portola,

Graeagle, and Susanville. All these teams would travel to play each other. So there was a lot of semi-pro baseball activity in the Reno area at that time. All the teams liked to “pump up” their teams with out-of-state talent. Harolds Club brought in a lot of players, so Harrah’s Club wanted to bring in some players, too. Al Lansdon asked Charles Walgren if he knew any prospects or had any kids in California that might want to come up to Reno and play baseball. So there were three of us that Charlie contacted. One of them was a fellow named Bob Day. He was a catcher from Burlingame, California, and the other fellow’s name was Bob Blengino, a left-handed pitcher from San Francisco. Charlie Walgren asked the two Bobs and me if we would come to Reno. Of course, we all wanted to come to Reno, and the two Bobs didn’t have any problem coming up here, but I was very hesitant to ask my father if he would let me come to Reno to play baseball, because Reno was pretty much of an “evil sin city” in his mind. I



The three baseball players from St. Mary's College who played for the Harrah's team in the summer of 1947. l. to r.: Bob Day, Bob Blengino, and Dwayne Kling.

was very hesitant about asking my dad, but finally I got the courage to ask Dad, and Dad said, "Yes, you can go up there and play."

So Bob Blengino, Bob Day, and myself came here to Reno. Al Lansdon picked us up at the airport and drove us downtown to Harrah's Club. The baseball team usually met at Harrah's, so they're all hanging around the bar and standing around there waiting for us to get there. The entire team then got in about four or five cars, and we drove to Carson City and played a game there. After the game was over, we drove back to Harrah's, and we all went in and had a beer and talked about the ball game. That was my first day in Reno.

Al had got us rooms in a rooming house at 917 North Virginia. The building is no longer there. It was right across the street from the University of Nevada, almost across the street from Manzanita Lake. Harrah's Club paid for our rooms, and we had two places in town where we could go in and eat and sign the meal ticket. One of the places was Tiny's Waffle Shop. It was on North Virginia Street, about where the Horseshoe Club is located now. The other place we could eat was the Grand Cafe. The Grand Cafe was on Second Street, between Center and Virginia Street. It was owned by the Petrinovich family, and had been owned by Petrinoviches for many years. John Petrinovich was a good friend of Bill Harrah's, and, in fact, John eventually became food and beverage manager of Harrah's Club. The Grand Cafe was located in what would now be part of Harrah's Club. We could go in there and order anything we wanted, within reason. We didn't abuse it. To maintain our semi-professional status so that we could continue to play baseball in college, we were given jobs. None of us were twenty-one at that time, so we couldn't work in the casino, but Harrah's found jobs for us. We worked for awhile at Vaughn Lumber Mill, and we later worked at the Washoe County Golf Course.

A semi-professional player doesn't get paid solely for playing baseball. In fact, you aren't getting paid, period, to play baseball. You do not sign a contract with anyone saying that you will be paid to play baseball. You do *get* monetary rewards such as free meals and free room, but theoretically, it wasn't *contingent* upon

playing baseball. We made our money for working at the golf course or Vaughn Lumber Mill, and the pay was the same as other employees received. I got paid X-amount of dollars an hour, regardless of whether I was hitting .400 or not. Our pay was not related to our performance.

I hit .400 up here in semi-pro baseball two years in a row while playing for the Harrah's team. I had told my dad that the competition was pretty good up here, but there really wasn't that much competition in those days. We used to beat Carson City, Fallon, and Portola—teams like that—consistently, and a lot of times we beat them fifteen to one, eighteen to one. Harrah's was very dominant in baseball. The smaller towns like Fallon and Carson City didn't go out after college kids like Harolds Club and Harrah's did, so it was hard for them to compete with us. In my way of thinking, this goes back to Bill Harrah's philosophy: if you're going to have a baseball team, you want to have the best baseball team. You want to have the best players and the best equipment and the best uniforms. The two years I played for Harrah's Club, 1947 and 1948, we won the state championship. If you want to have the best gambling casino, it's only natural you would want to have the best baseball team. I didn't think of that at the time. I was a seventeen-year-old kid, but, looking back on it, Harrah expended the effort, the money, and the time to make sure that he had the best possible team.

Did you start to play casino games that first summer?

Yes, I did. I was seventeen years old when I came up, and the other two kids I came up with were nineteen and twenty, but we could gamble in just about any casino. Harrah's Club never bothered us during the day shift. The bouncers and the pit bosses knew we were baseball players and never bothered us. I guess there wasn't an awful lot of steam from the Nevada gaming authorities, but when the swing shift security guards came on, they wouldn't let us play; they'd run us right out, and after awhile we didn't even bother to try and play there. The same way at Harolds Club. At certain times of the day you could play in

Harolds Club without any problem, but not always. We got run out of there a lot.

It's not like we played every day. We'd work during the daytime, and we'd walk downtown to get something to eat and maybe play a little, and maybe we wouldn't. If we didn't have a ball game, there wasn't anything else for us to do. So it wasn't that we gambled every day, but we did gamble on occasion. Some of the bouncers in Harrah's were UNR students. There were two or three football players that were working at Harrah's as bouncers, and Harolds Club also had a couple. There's always a camaraderie between athletes. If you say you're a baseball player at college, and I say I'm a football player at college, right away we have something in common that we can talk about. So the bouncers—the kids that were going to the University of Nevada—pretty much left us alone.

Gambling was fascinating. I didn't become addicted to it, but it was exciting, and I liked to play, and the two guys I was with liked to play, too. In fact, actually, the first year I probably wouldn't have played that much, but Bob Day *really* liked to play. He'd go down and lose all his paycheck, and I'd always have a couple of dollars set aside to tide him over. [laughter] He and Bob Blengino were always borrowing money from me to keep them going. When you hang out with guys, if one or two of them gamble, then the other guy goes along and gambles, too. My favorite game was twenty-one. Bob Day loved to play the crap table. He'd shout and holler and throw the dice and make a lot of noise.

Why did you like playing twenty-one?

I don't really know. I guess it was the easy, fast, quick decisions. I like quick decisions. If I did play dice, I liked to play the field, because you have an instant decision on your money. You win or lose almost instantly. Of course, on a twenty-one game, you win or lose a lot faster than you do on a crap table. When you're shooting for a point, you might shoot for that point for ten, twelve rolls, and at that time, not knowing anything other than betting on the line at the crap table, when I wanted a fast decision, I would bet the field on the crap table.

We played ball in Reno up until August. When I went to go home, I didn't really have that much money, but the last night we were in town, I played twenty-one, and I had the biggest run of luck I ever had in my life and, of course, didn't know enough to take advantage of it. I wound up winning \$130 playing twenty-one, and I don't think I ever bet over two dollars. So you can imagine how many hands I won, but I never had the brains or the courage to let it ride. I cashed out that money and caught an airplane the next morning. In fact, I think I gambled most of the night. I was just thrilled to death to have that much money. [laughter] I got home, and I said to Dad, "Boy, I saved \$130 this summer. I really did good up there."

Dad says, "I thought you'd save a lot more money than that." He said, "You had free room, and you had free board, and you had a job. You should have had a lot more money than that."

I said, "Well, all I managed to save was \$130." Little did he know, I didn't save anything! [laughter] I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't got lucky that last night.

In the fall I went back to St. Mary's and played another season of baseball. Then in June of 1948 Al Lansdon contacted me and wanted me to come to Reno again, and he said, "Bring Bob Day and Bob Blengino."

I said, "Well, they're both playing professional baseball." Bob Day signed with the Philadelphia Athletics, and Bob Blengino had also signed a contract. I don't remember who he signed with. So I didn't have two people to bring with me.

He said, "Bring me up another pitcher and catcher," because, of course, pitchers and catchers dominate a baseball team.

In the old days, Connie Mack, manager of the Athletics, said, "Pitching is 75 percent of the game." And that's still true today.

So I found a pitcher named Carroll Canfield out of Sacramento and a catcher named Stan Dembecki. He was from Bayonne, New Jersey, and was going to St. Mary's College on a baseball *and* football scholarship. I called Al and told him that I'd bring up a catcher and a pitcher in a couple of weeks.

A few days later I got an emergency phone call from Al. He said, "You guys have to come up next week." He said, "You got to be here on Monday."

So I said, "OK, we'll be there." I got ahold of Carroll and Stan, and we flew to Reno. We got into Reno about twelve o'clock, and I said to Al, "What was the big rush to get here?"

He said, "We're playing Harolds Club tonight." He said, "Bill Harrah and Harold Smith have made a ten-thousand-dollar bet on this baseball game, and we wanted all our good ball players here."

So the game starts, and Harolds Club got ahead of us about seven to two. Then, all of a sudden, our bats came to life, and we started scoring some runs. Somebody got a hit there and a hit there, and we pulled ahead of them. Then the whole thing fell apart, and we wound up beating Harolds Club, *eighteen* to seven. Really kicked them around a lot.

After the ball game we're in the dressing room changing clothes, getting ready to go out, when Bob Ring comes into the dressing room, and he said, "Bill Harrah wants to take all the ball players, and their wives, or girlfriends, their friends, and family to the Mapes Sky Room next week. He's going to throw a big party, and he wants everybody to be there."

I thought it was really classy of Bill Harrah to take over the Sky Room in the Mapes. So the three of us from St. Mary's went there, and our first baseman, Lou Barkley, was there with his wife, and Lee DeLauer had his wife there. Buddy Garfinkle, who was in the Washoe School system for many, many years, was there. Joey Elcano was there. The whole ball team was there. I don't remember how many were there altogether. I was eighteen years old by that time, and that night I had my first taste of champagne. I had never drunk champagne in my life before. I had drunk a few beers, and that was about it. We had champagne, and we had steaks. We had everything you could ask for. It was just a great party.

At that time John Harrah, Bill Harrah's father, was married to a lady from Canada. John Harrah was married several times after he was in his sixties. He was probably married four or five times in the 1940s and 1950s. So, at this time, he was married to a younger lady, a lady probably about thirty-five years old, and John Harrah had to be about sixty-five at that time. His wife had three younger sisters, and they were all at the party. So the three St. Mary's boys wound up as escorts to the three girls, who were,

actually, John Harrah's sister-in-laws. [laughter] So we wound up sitting with them, dancing with them and partying with them. When it was time to go home, we wanted to continue on seeing the girls, so the oldest sister went up to her sister, John Harrah's wife, and asked if we could borrow their car. John Harrah had a big black Packard convertible at that time. So the three St. Mary's boys and John Harrah's sisters-in-law got in this Packard convertible, and we're driving down Virginia Street, and I thought, "This is really amazing, an eighteen-year-old farm kid is driving this Packard convertible with John Harrah's sisters-in-law, up and down Virginia Street." [laughter] And that was my first exposure to champagne, filet mignon, and party life in Reno.

Did you ever meet Bill Harrah?

Not really. I talked more to John Harrah, because of going out with his sister-in-law, than I ever talked to Bill Harrah. I don't actually recall ever saying anything more than hello to Bill Harrah. There was never any conversation. He would come to some of the ball games, but he would not come to all of them, and he never came in the dressing room or came down in the dugout. I don't think he was really interested in baseball that much. I have no indication that he ever was a baseball fan, or that he really cared for us as a team. I think what he wanted to do, as I've mentioned earlier, is to have *the* best baseball team in the state of Nevada.

In 1948, after we won the state championship, we went to Wichita, Kansas, to play for the national championship. To show you how much class Bill Harrah had, even in those days, he chartered an entire railroad car that went directly from Reno to Wichita. He got us new uniforms to wear back in Wichita, got us blazer-type sport jackets that were emblazoned with Harrah's Club advertising: "Harrah's Club—Your Reno Host" in the front and in large letters, "Harrah's Club, Reno, Nevada" on the back. We brought along cases of Harrah's Club ashtrays and Harrah's Club matches. We were paid twenty dollars a day, and we were paid in silver dollars that had little stickers on them that said, "Harrah's Club—Your Reno Host." As we traveled across the

country, we'd stop at cities such as Salt Lake City, Denver, and Pueblo, Colorado, and every place we stopped we would hand out souvenirs or advertising for Harrah's. When we arrived in Wichita, Kansas, we stayed in the very best hotel there, the Broadview Hotel. It was a very expensive hotel, but there was no doubt that that's where Harrah's would stay; we stayed in the best. Bob Ring went along with us as the business manager. He carried all the money he paid us every day and handled the financial end of the trip. Bob liked baseball, he liked to party, and he liked to advertise. The sad thing about it was that we lost our first two games, and we were eliminated, so we had to head back to Reno. It was a great advertising ploy that Bill Harrah used in 1948 with that team, because his casino had only been open two years, and he's already spending money trying to spread the name across the United States. He spent the money the same way coming back, and we were still handing out ashtrays and matches on the way home. He didn't treat us any differently because we lost.

Bill Harrah, at that time, was seeing a girl named Scherry Teague. She and Bill Harrah got married in August of 1948. I remember it well, because it was just a few days before we got on the train to go to Wichita. Bob Ring was Bill Harrah's best man, and Bill Harrah and Scherry, with Bob Ring as best man, got married about two days before we went back to Wichita. After Wichita I went back to St. Mary's to start my third year in college.

Did anything unusual or interesting happen that year?

Well, the academic year was about the same, and the baseball year was the same. However, in the spring of 1949 I met my first wife. Once again, baseball played a role in my life. Earlier I mentioned that there were different dances and functions held out at St. Mary's College, and I met my wife at a function sponsored by the Block SM Society. My first wife's name was Eugenia Lalantonis, and she lived in Oakland, California. She and a girlfriend came out to St. Mary's to attend the dance and have a good time. My roommate, Moff Roman, was dancing with her girlfriend, and Eugenia was standing there by herself. So Moff came over and got me to dance with Eugenia, so that she wouldn't

be standing there and getting impatient and want to leave. So I met Eugenia, then, in April of 1949, and to skip ahead, we were married in September of 1950.

When the school year ended, I didn't go back to Reno to play baseball. I was contacted by a team in Weiser, Idaho, a small town in the southwest part of Idaho. It was the same situation as Reno. They furnished us with jobs and a place to stay. There were three of us that went up from St. Mary's to spend the summer at Weiser playing baseball, and, ironically, we won the state semi-pro championship of Idaho. This was the first time Weiser had ever even come close to gaining any notoriety in baseball, since about 1905. [laughter] In 1905 one of the greatest pitchers of all times played for Weiser. His name was Walter Johnson. Johnson, who is in the Hall of Fame, pitched for the Washington Senators for many years and later married the daughter of the Reno mayor, E.E. Roberts. Walter Johnson spent a lot of time in Reno, which isn't really important to this story, other than the fact that Weiser, Idaho, had a great team in 1905, and it was 1949 before they had another great one. [laughter] Weiser is a farming community, and many of those farmers collected money, did fundraising, and actually *donated* money, just *gave* money, because they wanted Weiser to go back to Wichita, Kansas and be represented in the national tournament.

I, of course, had played in Wichita the year before, and I knew our team wasn't that good. It really wasn't capable of coming close to winning the national tournament, but there was no way I was going to say anything like that. So these farmers and local businessmen gathered all this money. I don't remember how much it cost to send us there. We got in six private automobiles and we drove from Weiser, Idaho, to Wichita, Kansas. We had to stay overnight two or three times, and by the time we got back to Wichita, our money supply was low. I don't know how much money they had, but we just barely got by. We stayed in a small hotel, and it was complete night and day from the year before. With Harrah's we had plenty of money, we stayed in the best hotels and ate the best food, and here we are the next year trying to get by with whatever we could. But the results were the same: we went back there, we lost two games, we were eliminated, and

we came back home again. [laughter] So that was the end of my semi-pro experience in Weiser.

What did you do for a job?

It was a *really* tough job. I had two tough jobs up there. The first job was digging telephone holes. They would give me a post hole digger and drop me out along the road all by myself. So I had a post hole digger and a big container of water, and I spent the days trying to dig post holes. *Really* tough job. I lasted on that about two weeks, and then we told the manager it was just too much physical work for us. We were getting blisters, and we were too tired to play baseball. [laughter] We couldn't do the job.

So then we got another job, and that was a little bit easier, but not much. We worked as cement helpers. They were building a hospital in Weiser, and you know how they pour the cement out of the trucks and then you come along and smooth it out. Well, that's what we did. Then, before the season was over, it wound up that we didn't have any jobs at all. They paid us a few dollars just to keep us there. I didn't get home with hardly any money at all that year. Of course, I didn't gamble and lose any. We just didn't get paid the money in Weiser that we did in Reno.

I went back to school in September of 1949, and now it's my senior year in college. That year's baseball team was the best team of my four years at St. Mary's. We had quite a few sophomores on the team, and there was me and two other seniors. We started out by beating Santa Clara, and we beat Stanford, and we beat USC and UCLA, and we beat everybody except Cal. The University of California always beat us. That was one thing that bothered me all my life. I was there four years, and we played the University of California three times a year. So we played them twelve times over that four-year time frame. Never, ever beat the University of California. [laughter] We beat everybody else. We beat Stanford, USC, UCLA, and Santa Clara, but never could beat Cal. So we started off the season in a blaze of glory, and then we ran into Cal, and Cal beat us three straight games. After that we lost a couple, and we wound up coming in third place. So while I was there, we never did win a championship or even come close to winning one at St. Mary's.

I graduated from St. Mary's on June 6, 1950, and as soon as I graduated a few baseball scouts talked to me, but no one really came up with the amount of bonus money that I thought I should get or that I wanted. Ironically, the year before, when I'd come back from Idaho, the Detroit Tigers had offered me five thousand dollars to sign and four hundred dollars a month to play in Modesto, which was good money in those days. My home was close to Modesto, and they figured I'd draw a lot of people the last six weeks of the season. So I was offered five thousand dollars, but my brother, Bill, who was the financial person in the family at that time said, "Oh, if they'll give you five thousand dollars now, you'll get more when you graduate, and if you sign now, you're going to lose your scholarship, and you won't be able to play ball in college. I really think you should turn down the five thousand dollars."

At that time, I was only nineteen, and my dad, of course, felt the way that my brother did. So we came to the conclusion, "Well, we won't sign for five thousand dollars. We'll wait until I graduate, and then I'll get more money."

So in June of 1950 when I *did* graduate, I never got offered anywhere close to five thousand dollars. Boston, Detroit and Philadelphia were only going to give me five hundred dollars to sign, and finally, I signed with the New York Yankees. I had always wanted to sign with the Yankees, anyhow. They were my number one choice.

They gave me one thousand dollars to



Dwayne with his parents at his graduation from St. Mary's College, 1950.

sign, and I was signed by a gentlemen named Joe Devine. Joe Devine was the *top* Yankee scout on the West Coast. He had signed just about every top Yankee player that had come from the Bay area, except Joe DiMaggio. He hadn't signed Joe DiMaggio; he was before Joe Devine's time. It was good to get signed by Joe Devine, because he pushed his players more. Scouts would get bonuses as their players advanced in the organization, so it was to their advantage to sign good ball players and help them advance.

Besides the one thousand dollar bonus, I also signed a contract for \$190 a month and was sent to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, which was in the Wisconsin State League. At that time, there were about fifty minor league teams in the United States, and they were classified alphabetically. Class D was the lowest league. It went Class D, Class C, Class B, Class A, Class AA, and Class AAA. The AAA's were one step away from the majors. Each major league team had what they called a farm system. They owned minor league teams, and after they would sign players, they would assign them to different cities. I was assigned to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and all the ball players on that Fond du Lac team were owned by the New York Yankees. So the expression "farm system" was a comparison to an agricultural farm. They were "growing" young ball players. They were developing them, and they hoped to reap the "crop" of a major league ball player from their farm systems.

So I was sent to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, in a Class D league. I was very disappointed, almost upset, that they were sending me to that class of league, because I *knew* I was better than that. I thought they were really making a mistake sending me to such a low league. [laughter] At that time I said, "Oh, I'm just going to show them what a big mistake they made by sending me to this lower classification." So the very first night that I played baseball—professional baseball—I was up to bat four times, and I got three hits. I got three for four, which, of course, is very good. Well, I thought, "I knew it all the time." I was better than this league. [laughter] So the next night, I didn't get any hits, and the night after that I didn't get any hits, and to make a long story short, I went to bat twenty-eight times without getting a hit. [laughter] By this time, I thought, "Boy, they were right."

[laughter] After I went so long without getting a hit, they benched me, and I didn't get to play for a long time. I got to Fond du Lac about June 15, and I probably only played about fifty games. After my one-game roaring start, I really had a poor season. I don't really know *what* I was doing wrong. If it was just being that far away from home or really what, I don't know. I wound up batting .222, which is *really* low. I did improve towards the end, but it was too little and too late. The season ended in September of 1950, and I returned to Oakland, where Eugenia lived, and we were married a few weeks later.

In those days you didn't get *paid* enough, when you were playing baseball, to support yourself all year, so the first thing you had to do when you got back from playing minor league baseball was to find yourself a job. I had a college degree, but it was useless to try and find a really good job, because unless you lied, they knew that you were going to leave to play baseball in six months.

Did you automatically have a contract for the next year?

Yes. Unless you were released, you knew you were going to get a contract, but you didn't know where you were going to play. You hadn't been assigned yet, because when you finished a season, then all the scouts, executives and statisticians would look at your record and say, "Oh, Kling only hit .222." And they'd look at the guy that played in Boise or the guy that played in another city, and they would evaluate him and analyze him and study their scouting reports, et cetera, and decide what to do with him and decide what to do with you. It was a huge amount of work, because there were around fifty minor leagues in that era, and all the major leagues had representatives in most of those leagues. The Yankees, at that time, had at least three Class D farm teams. They probably had about three or four Class C teams, three or four Class B teams, and the same way with class A, AA, and AAA. So they had *hundreds* of players scattered around the United States that they had to keep records on. Another thing with the Yankees, and I don't know if all clubs did this, or not, but after every ball game, no matter what team, whether it was Fond du Lac or Boise, Idaho, or Denver, Colorado, or whoever, the team manager had to

send a detailed report into the main Yankee office in New York. They would send in the box score of the game, and they would write a report of what happened during that game. For example: the pitcher got hit a lot, or the third base man made some great plays, or Bob Ruck hit three home runs, or Dwayne Kling made four errors, or whatever. All those things were *noted*, and it was kind of like a daily report, something that Harrah's used later on. [laughter]

When I came home I got a job as a shipping clerk, and I worked as a shipping clerk until the spring of 1951. The Korean War had started in June of 1950, and when I got home in the fall of 1950, I went to enlist in the air force. I wanted to be an air force pilot, but they weren't taking married people as cadets. They would accept me as a ground officer, but I didn't want to be a ground officer. I either wanted to fly or just take my chances on being drafted.

In March of 1951 I got two letters in the mail. One letter was from the draft board, and it ordered me to report for induction at Fort Ord, California, and in the very same mail box, I had a letter from the Yankees, asking me to report to spring training. [laughter] I had been assigned to Twin Falls, Idaho, in the Pioneer League. Well, naturally, there was no doubt as to which offer I would accept. [laughter]

So on April 25 I reported to the induction center in Oakland, California, and they bused me and a bunch of other guys to Fort Ord. I started my basic training in Fort Ord, and there were a couple of men in the personnel office that had been assigned there by the commanding officer of the Sixty-Third Infantry Regiment. The C.O. was kind of like Bill Harrah; he wanted to have the best team. So he had assigned two people in personnel to screen all the people that were being drafted into the army. So when these two guys—they were twins, and they were from the University of Santa Clara, Hal and Harvey Toso—spotted my name, they knew it immediately, because we'd competed against each other in college. They knew I'd been captain of the team. They knew I'd been on the all-star team, and they knew I was a good college ball player. So they immediately pulled my name out, however they did it, and put me in the Sixty-Third Infantry Regiment.

Did you complete your basic training before you were transferred into that regiment?

No, I was assigned to Company G in the Sixty-Third Regiment, and I was ordered to go to clerk-typist school, but I first had to undergo six weeks of basic training. Everyone had to undergo that six weeks. If you were in the infantry, and you were going to go to Korea as an infantryman, then you went to fourteen weeks basic training. So the guys that weren't going to be trained for combat were sent to six weeks basic training.

During that six weeks of basic training it was against army policy to allow anyone off the post or to allow anyone out of even their company area, unless they were assigned to some kind of a duty, but because they had put me on the baseball team immediately, if we were on a training maneuver or marching out to bivouac, here would come the colonel's jeep with the colonel's driver in it, and he would go up to the company commander and ask for Private Kling. [laughter] The company commander would always get very irritated about it, but he always had to let me off the army training, so that I could go practice baseball. [laughter] So I had it comparatively easy in basic training, because of getting off to play baseball so much of the time. I was probably the only guy that got off of the post during their basic training period, because I'd get off the post to travel to ball games.

After I completed that six weeks of basic training, I was assigned to company head-



Private Kling in 1951.

quarters. I was the company clerk of the Sixty-Third Infantry Regiment and continued to play baseball until about the end of September. We had completed the baseball season, and some of the other commanders were irritated that the Sixty-Third had all these good ball players on this team, and all we were doing was playing baseball.

Our catcher and our manager was a fellow named Del Crandall, who was one of the top catchers in the major leagues in the 1950s and early 1960s. He made the all-star team several times, and later he managed several years in the major leagues. We had several Coast League players like Mike Baxes, Jim Baxes, and Bill Wilson. All the good ball players were on that team. Eventually, someone from Sixth Army headquarters in San Francisco said, "Well, we've got to break up this team." So they broke us up and sent us all over the world. Some went to Ft. Huachuca, Arizona. A lot went to Tokyo, Japan. In fact, probably half of the team went to Tokyo, Japan, and they wound up playing for an army team in Tokyo.

I was the only one, for some reason, and I don't know why, but I got sent to Camp Irwin, which is near Barstow, California. It was a tank training center, and I was assigned to training headquarters. I did typing and worked in the office of a major that was in charge of the training. When baseball season started, Camp Irwin didn't have a baseball team, so I formed a baseball team and became manager of the team.

In the meantime, the war in Korea was heating up even more, and in the summer of 1952 the fighting had become very intense. Every week orders would come down from army headquarters saying that they needed personnel for what was called FECOM. It stood for Far East Command. And no one . . . I shouldn't say no one, but most people didn't care to go to Korea and fight. It wasn't that people resisted it as much as they did in Vietnam, but the Korean War, coming so close as it did to the end of World War II, wasn't a very popular war, either, but I must say a much more popular war than Vietnam. A lot of people were being taken out of our training office, and as the war went along I wound up being the only person left in the office, other than the major.

One day I was assigned to KP duty, and I was washing the pots and pans, when all of a sudden the major's jeep pulled up out in front, and the driver jumped out, and he ordered me to report to the major's office immediately. I had no idea why I was ordered there, but when I got back, I walked into the major's office with my dirty, smelly fatigues on, and there was a one-star general, a couple of colonels, and our major. The general had come over from Los Angeles to study and to look at our training and see how it was coming along. The major had locked all the plans, maps, and everything in the safe in his office, and he had forgotten the combination of the safe. Usually, it was my job every morning to open the safe and get the classified things out of there, so he'd forgotten the combination. I've often thought how embarrassed that major must have been. I was a little concerned that I might not be able to get it open, but I got it open first whack and took everything out of the safe and put it on the desk and went back to KP duty. The next day the major was very thankful that I'd been able to get it open, and we had a very good relationship after that, but it didn't last very long.

One day he came to me and he said, "There's a request for a clerk typist in the Caribbean area." And he said, "Maybe you should take it." He says, "I think if you stay here any longer, you're going to be sent to Korea." He said, "If you want to go to Korea, that's fine, and if you want to stay here and take your chances, that's fine, but if you want to go to the Caribbean area," which we thought was going to be Puerto Rico, "if you want to go there, you can go there."

So I said, "Sure," and I was sent to the Caribbean area, which wound up being the Republic of Panama. I was stationed at Fort Corozal just outside of Panama City. When I got to Fort Corozal, they really didn't have anything for me to do, so they made me a supply clerk for a week or so, until they found out that I was a former professional baseball player. Then the special services sergeant came and got me for the baseball team. He took me out of the supply depot, and I was assigned as a lifeguard at the dependents' swimming pool. My wife flew down to Panama City, and we rented an apartment in Panama City. I would drive back

and forth from Panama City to the lifeguard job every day. I worked from eight to twelve as a lifeguard, had lunch, and at one o'clock, we either practiced baseball, or we had a baseball game. That was pretty much my army duty in Panama.

During the winter there were professional winter leagues in Panama City and, of course, in other areas, too: Cuba, Puerto Rico, et cetera. The army allowed a few of us to try out for the professional baseball team, and they said, if we made it, it was OK for us to play, as long as it didn't interfere with our army baseball games. I tried out for and made the professional Panama City baseball team. So between playing baseball for the army and the professional team, I would play as many as seven to ten games a week. Oftentimes I'd play one game in the afternoon for the army and play that same night for the pro team. I had a really good season in the winter league and got a lot of media exposure in the United States. The Yankees were following me, and several reports were written up in the *Sporting News*, which was the big baseball paper publication at that time, so the Yankees figured I'd really improved a lot in those couple of years that I'd been in the service.

I was discharged from the army in February of 1953, and about four or five days after I got out of the army, the Yankees were starting a rookie spring training and special instructional camp in Glendale, California, which was where Casey Stengel had lived for many years. I was invited by the Yankees to report to their spring training camp, which was a really big jump for me. One of the highlights of my baseball career was going to spring training and meeting Casey Stengel, and playing for Casey, and playing with so many Yankee rookies that became established stars in the near future. I had a fairly good spring, but nothing great.

When the spring training ended, a gentleman named Lee MacPhail, who later became president of the Yankees—he was director of their farm system then—called me up to his office and said, "We're going to send you to Boise, Idaho." Boise, Idaho, had replaced Twin Falls in the Yankee farm system. It was a Class C league, so it was a promotion for me. I actually did OK during spring training, but I could have done better. I think part of it was

that when I came back from overseas I only weighed 160 pounds. I'd played so much baseball in Panama that I think I'd over-extended myself and was too tired to have a great spring.

Let me tell you my favorite story about Casey Stengel. In one of the games, he put me in to pinch hit in the top half of the ninth inning. There were two outs and a runner on first base. Well, the pitcher threw me one pitch, and I took it for a strike. Then, the pitcher picked the base runner off of first base, and the inning was over. I didn't even get to swing the bat, but I did go out and play the last half of the ninth inning. Well, the next day in the clubhouse Stengel says, "I'd start Kling at third base today, but he killed a rally for me yesterday." And that became a big joke for him. He continued that joke for the rest of spring training, calling me the "rally killer," whereas, of course, I didn't kill a rally at all. I didn't even get to swing the bat. [laughter]

I had a guy playing ahead of me down there named Andy Carey, and Andy wound up playing in the majors for about ten years and had some good years with the Yankees and the Los Angeles Dodgers. So competition was pretty tough, and I just didn't make it.

So I went to Boise and had a pretty good year there. I played every inning of every game. I batted about .285, and I had almost a hundred RBI's. My first daughter was born while I was at Boise. My wife stayed in Oakland, and my daughter Michelle



Dwayne in his Boise Yankees uniform.

was born on May 8, 1953. After about a month, my sister-in-law drove my wife and Michelle to Boise, and they spent the summer with me.

At the end of the season we went back to Oakland, and I found another part-time job. That winter I worked on an automobile assembly line. They were building Plymouths in San Leandro, California, and I got a job on the assembly line, built automobiles all winter, which was a *different* experience, a unique experience. [laughter] My part of the assembly line was to insert the motors into the frames as they were coming down the assembly line. You had a worksheet there that said the different types of cars or models that were coming, and you, of course, had a different engine for different models. So I stood there all day, and I'd run my little crane over and pick up the right engine and drop it in the frame. Got to be a very boring job, but it paid the bills that winter.

In the spring of 1954 I got a contract from the Yankees to play for Edmonton, Canada. That was a good jump. It was in a Class A league at that time. So I went from a Class C to a Class A, mainly because I had had a good year in Boise. I got paid four hundred dollars a month, and I thought that was *big* money, but then I didn't do well at all in Edmonton. I didn't even make the starting



"My first daughter [Michelle] was born while I was at Boise." Dwayne and Michelle in June of 2000.

lineup. I wound up as a substitute, and I filled in at second base and short stop.

We took spring training in Lindsay, California, of all places. Then we traveled by bus up to Salem, Oregon, and opened the season there. We played at Lewiston, Idaho, and at Tri-Cities, Washington on the way to Edmonton. Then we opened our home season at Edmonton. I lasted in Edmonton about three weeks. Our manager's name was Bobby Sturgeon. He had been a major league ball player for several years, and he was a good glove man, but a very weak hitter. He had managed to stay in the majors for a long time, because of his glove, and he told me he liked my glove, but he played the other guy ahead of me, because of his bat. He said, "You're as good a fielding third base man as anyone playing in the major leagues right now, and your glove could almost carry you, but you just don't *hit* enough."

In the very last game I played he put me in to pinch hit, and I didn't know at the time that it was to be my last professional at bat. I hit a really good solid ground ball right up the middle. The shortstop managed to get over and knock it down, but he didn't throw me out at first base. So I got on base on an error and later scored a run. After the game was over Sturgeon said he had orders to release me, but he said, "You know, if that ball had a been about six inches more to the right, it would have been a base hit. I probably could have saved you, because I could have told the Yankees, 'Well, I put him into pinch hit, and he got a base hit.'" Instead, he had to tell the Yankees that he put me in, and I got on base on an error.

He was very nice about it. He wrote me three reference letters to different ball clubs, but at that time I was just so depressed that I didn't follow through with it, and, of course, I've regretted it a hundred times or more that I didn't go try out for another baseball team, but at the time, I was twenty-three years old. I had a baby about a year old. I had another baby on the way. My wife was in Oakland, and I was in Canada. I thought, "If I have to go down to a lower classification at twenty-four, pretty soon I'm going to be too old to make it," so I did quit. Probably, if I had to do it over again, I would have tried it, but then the big factor was that I was married, had a pregnant wife and a little baby, and I thought I had better get to work and get on with my life.

BEGINNING A CAREER IN GAMING: HAROLDS CLUB

I WAS RELEASED in late May, early June 1954, and headed back from Canada to California. My wife, Eugenia, was in Oakland, California. I stopped in Reno, Nevada, and, of course, I knew a lot of people in Reno from having played baseball there a couple of years. I was *known*, or remembered, as a good semi-pro baseball player, and a fellow by the name of Fred Smith was managing a baseball team called the Reno-Sparks Pioneers. He was getting a certain amount of monetary help from Harolds Club. Fred worked in Harolds Club as a slot mechanic, and he had gotten a few guys jobs there. He had three college ball players from USC that were playing for him at the time, and he said to me, "If I get you a job at Harolds Club, will you stay and play baseball for me this summer?"

So I said, "Yes, I'll do that." I was going to start San Jose State in the fall, because I needed a fifth year to get my teacher's credential, and I needed a job to carry me over until school started.

The first job I had at Harolds Club was at their warehouse on Coney Island Drive near Galletti Way. They kept slot machines, advertising material, and different things out there, but I just

wasn't a warehouse kind of guy, and I lasted in that job for about a week. I went to Fred, and I said, "I think if I don't quit this job, I'm going to get fired." [laughter] I wasn't really getting along with their idea of grunt labor.

So he said, "Well, I can get you a job as a change boy, change person on graveyard."

I said, "Well, that will be fine. I'll do that." So that's what I did. I started carrying change in Harolds Club in June of 1954 for eleven dollars a shift. We rented a garage in an alley in Sparks, Nevada on "H" Street. [laughter] We had only one bedroom, and it was really a shack. I got a little bit extra for playing baseball, but it was a tough time. Actually, the baseball pay wasn't that much, but I had really no money saved to go to college, and I needed to save some.

I was depressed. I didn't even really enjoy playing baseball, because I knew now that I would never be a major leaguer. I had worked for that goal for ten or fifteen years. That is all I'd been focused on—to be a professional baseball player in the major leagues. Now I had lost that. I lost the love of baseball, and after that season ended I didn't touch a baseball for years and years. Didn't even *touch* a baseball. Didn't even watch a baseball game. I took the baseball job because, by working at Harolds Club, I could save enough money to go to college in the fall, without having to work full-time. At the end of the season we got a few hundred dollars extra for playing baseball, but I was burned out on baseball.

I played three to four games a week for the Pioneers. I would work graveyard from midnight to eight, and when I got off in the morning, I'd go home and sleep for an hour or two and play a ball game on Sunday afternoon. When we played on Saturday night, I'd get done playing in time to go to work at midnight. I did that all summer. Towards the end of summer Fred said, "I'd like it if you'd stay around until the end of September and finish the season with us."

I said, "Well, I have to get back to school."

He said, "Well, why don't you go to the University of Nevada?"

I guess there wasn't any such thing as an out-of-state fee then, because money was not a problem. It was just as reasonable as

going to San Jose State. So I kept my job on graveyard, and I went to school during the daytime, but I only took five or six credits. I never did get enough credits to get my teaching credential. It would have taken me probably two or three years, because I was only going to school part time.

In the meantime, while I was going to school and working at Harolds Club, I decided I wanted to learn how to deal. I learned how to deal dice on my own time; I did not go to dealer's school. I would go in maybe a half an hour or an hour before work and get permission from a floor manager and the dealers to go on their table and practice. Also, when I'd get breaks during my shift, I would go practice on the tables. Sometimes, if I wasn't going to school that day, I'd practice for an hour or two in the morning when I got off work. So I spent probably about eight or nine months learning to deal that way on my own time. I got to be a pretty good dealer, but there were no openings. I was just sitting there on graveyard with absolutely no openings. It's amazing when you think of it, in this day and age. I mean, now crap dealers come and go so fast you can't even keep track of them, but there was never an opening for me, and that shows you what a good job Harolds Club was in those days.

Anyhow, after about a year I was a key man working in the slot department for fourteen dollars a day, and my wife and I had just had a baby daughter, Connie, born on October 28, 1954. So I decided that, if I can't get a dealing job, I would get off the graveyard shift. I asked the shift manager if I could go on swing, and he said, "Oh, sure." He worked it out, and in a week or two I was assigned to swing shift as a key man in the slot department.

When I came on swing shift—and this was kind of typical Harolds Club, too—nobody knew I was coming. I walked in and said, "Here I am." [laughter] They didn't know I was coming. They didn't know what to do with me, and they didn't have me scheduled. The shift manager's name was Don McDonnell, and he said, "Well, would you like to learn how to deal dice?" [laughter]

I said, "Yes, I would really like to." I said, "I've been practicing it for about eight or nine months."

He said, "Let's go down to the dime table." That was every dice dealer's first job assignment, the dime table. They dealt actual



"My wife and I had just had a baby daughter, Connie, born on October 28, 1954." A recent photograph of Connie and Dwayne.

dimes. There were no dime chips in those days. We dealt actual dimes.

They put me on the table, and after they watched me about five minutes, the dealers told Don, "This guy knows how to deal already."

He came down and watched, and he said, "Oh, that's good." He said, "Well, you don't have to be a key man. We'll just start you dealing on the dime table." I started dealing on the dime table in Harolds Club on Memorial Day weekend of 1955. I went to work at sixteen dollars a day plus tips as a break-in dime dice dealer. The tips weren't very much on the dime table, though. If you made a dollar a day on a dime table, that was a big day. I enjoyed dealing, and I only had to deal the dime table about a month.

One night I had an experience on the dime table with a fellow named Joe Conforte, who is, or was, a long-time brothel owner in the state of Nevada. I was dealing the game, when this well-dressed fellow comes over to the dice table, and he must have had twenty dollars worth of dimes, and he starts playing the back line.

He would bet three or four dimes, and when he went behind the number he would always take full double odds, which on a four and ten, of course, means you're betting four times your original flat bet. So I'd wind up with ten, twelve, or sixteen dimes stacked back there as odds. I hadn't been dealing very long, and I was nervous, and I knocked the dimes over a couple of times. Then Joe Conforte started yelling and shouting at me, "*What's the matter? Don't you know how to deal?*" And blah, blah, blah, and on and on. I don't know what I said to him. [laughter] I really don't remember, but whatever I said really triggered him. He still had a handful of dimes, and he picks up this handful of dimes—he's only about two feet away from me—and he throws them at me! Behind me were some twenty-one tables and the back bar, where all the out-of-work people, the people with no money, and the hustlers hung out. When all those dimes—and there must have been, I would say, a minimum of eight to ten dollars worth of dimes—were scattered *all over* the back bar, those bums were jumping and running all over, trying to pick those dimes off the floor. [laughter] It was really a sight. Conforte yelled, "I don't need the money. I'm just trying to establish a new system of betting the back line." After he threw the dimes, he just stomped out the door.

One of the floor managers came back, because he had seen all this activity and heard all this hollering, and he said, "What happened?" When I told him what happened, he told me it was Joe Conforte, and that he ran the local brothels and whorehouses.

So that was my first experience with Joe Conforte, and I later ran into him several other times before my gaming career was over. He got to be where he was a pretty nice person. I have a few good thoughts of Joe Conforte. I think he did some good things. One thing I remember is years later, when I came back to Reno and was working for Harolds Club, they used to bring in veterans' buses from hospitals in San Francisco. Harolds Club would bring the vets in town to gamble and have a good time, and I don't know if everyone thinks this is nice, or not, but they were all handicapped people; they were people with an arm or a leg missing or maybe two legs missing. They were in wheelchairs, and they were really crippled kind of people, crippled veterans. Joe

Conforte would always take that busload of veterans out to his whorehouse on the edge of town, and he would furnish girls and free services—free sexual services for these veterans. [laughter] Like I say, I don't know if everybody would like that or not, but I—I thought it was gracious.

I first started dealing in May of 1955, and, as I mentioned earlier, I worked on the dime table for about one month. At that time they had a twenty-five-cent table. So I went to the twenty-five-cent table, and I worked there for about three months with a girl named Fran Sheehan. In those days Harolds Club always tried to see that there was a man and a woman together on the dice table. One of Pappy's and Harold Sr.'s theories was that if there were a woman on the dice table, it was good for business.



Dwayne Kling and Fran Sheehan dealing a dice game in Harolds Club in 1955.

After I had been on the twenty-five cent table for about three months, Harold Smith Sr. came over one night and played on my dice table. In those days it was not illegal for owners to play in their casinos. Now it is. Now, if you own a casino, you can't gamble in your casino, but in those days you could play whatever you wanted. Harold Sr. played on my end of our table for probably an hour, and he gave me a lot of action, but he never bet over five dollars. He was playing to see what kind of a dealer I was, more than anything else, and it wasn't just me he did it to. He did it to a lot of dealers during that time as they were breaking in, just to see if they were qualified to move to a higher-limit table. Sometimes he would seriously play in Harolds Club, but, as a rule, he played mainly just to check out the dealers.

When you were moved to a higher limit table, the pay was the same but the tips were much, much better. As I mentioned before, if you made a dollar in tips on the dime table, that was a good night. If you made two or three dollars a night on the quarter table, that was a good night, and even as we were making two or three dollars on the quarter table, dealers on the dollar tables, the regular high-limit tables, were making maybe twenty-five or fifty dollars on a good day. Tips were never that strong in Harolds Club on the dice tables any time that I was around there. Twenty-one dealers would always make good money in tips, but a dice table was not a real lucrative place. The dice dealers stayed at Harolds, though, because they made more tips there than they made anywhere else, plus the working conditions were so great.

The large majority of dealers in Harolds Club were honest, but there was one period of time when a lady named Winnie and I were dealing number one dice, and right behind us was number two dice. The dealers at that table were eventually caught stealing. When a player would make a bet on an eleven, for example, they would *pay* the eleven, whether the eleven rolled or not. Or if they had a bet put up for them on the hard eight, if the bet lost, they would not take it down. They would let it stay up there until it hit. Sometimes they would make bets for themselves, saying that the customer had bet for them. They would put a dollar on the hard eight or something, and say,

“Thank you very much,” and there was really no one putting it up, except themselves.

Harolds Club did have people in the catwalk area, but the crews were very limited. They would have as few as two or three people working the entire twenty-four hour period. They followed the action, too. If there was a big game somewhere, they’d be watching the big game and not some little game. Everyone was cognizant of the fact that there was a catwalk crew up there, but very few people knew if there was one guy up there, or if they had a guy sitting over every game. A lot of the dealers were naïve enough to believe that somebody was over *every* game twenty-four hours a day. The way they finally caught the crew behind me was, my partner, Winnie, was an old-time dealer, and she’d been at Harolds Club, probably, at that time about fifteen years. So she knew all the bosses, and she knew the Smith family, and she just flat went to the shift manager and told him that these guys on two dice were doing these things. Then they put a surveillance on them and they caught them.

In Harolds Club there were some women who dealt dice and twenty-one, but usually, if you dealt dice, you were on a dice table all the time. The twenty-one dealers made a lot more money in tips, so if a woman dealt dice, it was no favor to her, but most of them liked the game. Some of the women dice dealers, in those days, were a little bit rougher type of person than the twenty-one dealers. Of course, dice, even to this day, is more of a masculine game than a feminine game, and some women enjoyed that. Sometimes, after awhile, a certain portion of them would complain about it and say, “You know, those twenty-one dealers are making all the money, and I’m not making any money here. I want a chance to learn to deal twenty-one, too.” I never knew of anyone being turned down.

Men very seldom dealt twenty-one when I was at Harolds. In the early years men may have dealt twenty-one, I don’t know. It wasn’t that we didn’t have any male twenty-one dealers, but there were very, very few, and they came to work after Harolds started hiring people from other clubs. You know, for many years Harolds Club didn’t hire anyone that had worked anywhere else. They broke in all their own dealers, and the turnover rate was so low that they didn’t have to go out looking for dealers.

Harolds Club also had a very relaxed supervisory arrangement. They had the fewest amount of floor men of any casino. The figures varied over the years, but I recall specifically, when I went on the floor at Harolds Club in 1963, we had forty-four to forty-eight table games on the first floor, and those forty-four to forty-eight tables were covered by two floor men. There were two sections on the first floor: section one and section two. The floor men couldn't do much except make fills and settle disputes. They couldn't spend much time watching the game. There would also be two floor men on the second floor, and when the seventh floor was open for gaming, you'd have one person there. The seventh floor never had that many games. It had, on the average, one dice table, four twenty-one's, and a wheel.

Harolds Club had a unique signaling system there that, to my knowledge, has never been used anywhere else. Every table in the club had a signaling button on the floor underneath it. In conjunction with the signaling button, there were two boards on the first floor, and two boards on the second floor that had all the numbers of the tables displayed. When a dealer would step on a button, it would make a noise that you could hear throughout the club. The bell would sound like a very loud telephone bell. It would also light up in white the number of the table on the board on the wall. Whenever anyone bet a hundred dollars, the dealer had to step on that bell, and that was a very short bell. A very short bell also would mean that they were getting low on money, and you should come over there and check and see if they needed any money. If they stood on the bell for a long time, for several seconds, that meant that they had really big trouble on the table. There was a big fight, or there was a customer dispute, or there was a major problem. Then all the floor men, the shift manager, the security guards—everyone would hone in on that table to see what the problem was.

In conjunction with that bell, they had another bell that you used when you wanted a cocktail waitress. That bell made a different kind of a sound—more of a dulcet sound, and it would light up the table number in red. When they wanted a floor man and pushed the floor man's bell, the table number would light up white, and for a cocktail waitress it would light up red. If they wanted a keno runner, they hit the cocktail waitress bell twice. So

they could signal for a floor man for a normal situation, a floor man for an emergency, and they could call for a cocktail waitress or a keno runner.

So when you were supervising twenty-two games, you were mainly answering bells, because there was almost always a bell. The twenty-one tables were numbered one through seventy-four, and the crap tables had a "D" in front of their numbers, because Pappy Smith didn't believe in the word craps; he called them dice tables. So it was D-1, D-2, et cetera. Harolds Club had fifteen dice tables at that time, and one of them was a dime table and one a quarter table. The dime game and the quarter games were mainly to break in the new dealers. The rest of the games were all a dollar to two hundred, or a dollar to five hundred. In 1955 they put in one table on the seventh floor that was five dollars to one thousand dollars, but most of the tables were a dollar to two hundred with double odds.

Another uniqueness of Harolds Club was the fact that they had, at that time, twenty-dollar chips. The rest of the casinos had, and still do have, of course, twenty-five dollar chips.

Another interesting thing about Harolds Club was that the relief dealer would relieve two people on one dice table and two people on another dice table. So the relief dealer would relieve four people. Same way on a twenty-one game. The relief dealer relieved four twenty-one dealers. So you worked one hour and twenty minutes with a twenty-minute break, and sometimes, when the dealers took lunch breaks, they would work two hours without a break. Of course, this was good for the house, because it cut the payroll. The only time it would be different would be if you were closing games on graveyard and had less tables. If you were relieving four tables, and they closed a table, then you would only have to relieve three games.

Currently, dealers work an hour on and twenty minutes off, and, in some places, they work forty minutes on and twenty off. However, at that time, and for many years prior to and after the time I left, Harolds Club dealers kept their own tokens. So if you had to be there eight hours, and if you were working six and a half out of those eight, you were making that much more money in tokens, and that was one big reason the dealers didn't complain too much.

Two of the biggest dice players in the Reno-Lake Tahoe area in the 1940s, 1950s, and into the 1960s were the Sahati brothers, Nick and Eddie. I never dealt to Eddie. He died about 1953, but Nick Sahati would play heavy in Harrah's and Harolds. He would sometimes get as much as twenty to forty thousand dollars ahead of you. In 1956, every Friday night for several months, Nick Sahati would come in and play on my dice table. My partner's name was Winnie Gribble, and every Friday, regular as clockwork, Nick Sahati would come in, and he'd beat us consistently. He would win anywhere from ten to twenty-five thousand dollars every time he played. We didn't beat him for a long time.

They finally split up Winnie and I, because we lost so much money to Nick. They left Winnie on one dice, because she had been there a long time, and she had "juice," which means she had connections with different people. They may have wanted to move her, but she said, "I've been on this table for a long time, and I'm not going to move."

So they scheduled me to work people's days off on other tables, and I never had a regularly scheduled table again. Harolds Club kept what they called an average win per dealer, so Winnie's and my average was pretty low. They weren't supposed to ever tell you, officially, what your actual average was, but there were some floor men who would tell you. It was really a big secret what your average was, so they never told us specifically what our average was, other than it wasn't good. Of course, it was very obvious to us that it was bad. There's no way it *could* be good, the way Sahati had been beating us. Actually, it was too bad they broke us up, because Winnie and I were a good combination. I was very soft and quiet and friendly with customers, and Winnie was more of a tougher, rougher kind of person.

There was a lot of competition between dealers in those days, and dealers would continually try and better themselves. Dealers used to watch other dealers. They'd say, "Oh, Ken Adams is dealing at the Cal-Neva. He's a really good dealer. You ought to go watch and see how he pays his come bets off and on," or "He has a way of figuring a horn bet that you should go check on." You would go on your breaks and observe dealers—twenty-one

dealers did this, too—and see how they dealt and try and improve yourself that way. You took a lot of pride in your work.

One of my shifts on my new schedule was to run breaks on the high-limit table on the seventh floor. When they opened the seventh floor they put in all high-limit tables up there. All the twenty-one tables were five dollars to five hundred dollars, and the dice table was a five-to-five-hundred-dollar table. They put two of their older, experienced dealers on that table on the seventh floor when they opened it. I felt honored that I got to work the days off on that seventh floor table, and I also got to work the relief on that table on the seventh floor and a table on the second floor.

One time I was on the seventh floor table, and we were standing there dead, when Harold Jr. comes up to the table, and he has four or five people with him. I didn't know who any of them were, but I found out later that one of them was Bernie Einstoss, who operated the games at the Mapes Hotel. Bernie was with Ruby Mathis,¹ Charles Mapes, and Charles Mapes's sister, Gloria. That's the only people I remember. So Harold Jr. said to me, "Give Bernie five thousand, and give Ruby Mathis five thousand and Mr. Mapes five thousand." So I looked at Harold, and I didn't hear exactly what he said, plus, I didn't know Ruby Mathis from Bernie Einstoss. So I gave him a quizzical look, and it really irritated Harold Jr. [laughter] He thought I was questioning his authority to give this money out, and he said, "Are you having trouble doing what I'm telling you to do?"

I said, "No, sir." I said, "I just didn't quite understand it."

He said, "I want you to give that guy five thousand and that guy five thousand, et cetera." Anyhow, I gave them all money.

Harold Jr. was probably, I'd say, twenty-three or twenty-four years old at that time, and he was probably exceeding his power or authority, but I wasn't really going to question it, and I didn't mean to question it, but he thought I was. The way it turned out, by the time I gave everybody all their money, the regular dealer came back, so I never actually dealt to them. I gave them all the money, and then I went on a break. When I came back, they were gone.

Another thing I remember about the seventh floor was standing there on a dead game, and I'm watching this twenty-one

table, and Bill Fong is playing there. Bill Fong was, at that time, the owner of the New China Club. He was an Oriental person and a very heavy player. He loved to play—loved to gamble. In those days you could play all seven hands on a twenty-one table, and Bill Fong had five hundred dollars bet on all seven hands on the table I was watching. As I'm watching, he takes a hit card, and then he stands on the next hand. He turns over the next hand, and he's got a blackjack on that one. Then he's got a double-down on this one and so on. He winds up with—between his double-downs and his blackjacks—probably five thousand dollars on the table. When he gets to his last hand, I'm standing right next to third base, and I can see his cards when he picks them up. He's got two deuces, and he's got a four, and me, being a naïve young man, said, "Oh, he's got to hit that." Well, of course, Bill Fong had looked at, at least, sixteen to twenty cards, and he took those two deuces and pow! He put them right under his money. That meant he was *good*; he didn't want a hit. So I thought, "Boy, this guy is really not too smart. He's standing on four. Everyone hits four." Well, the dealer turns her card over and she has a stiff—a stiff is any hand that you can hit and break—and she hits that stiff with a ten and, of course, goes broke.

Now, Bill Fong wins all the money on the table. He probably picks up five, six thousand dollars, at least. At the time, I thought, "Boy, he's really lucky," but in future years, as I look back on it, I realize the reason he stood on four was because he had counted the cards, and he knew a ten was coming up. He was a card counter before the word "card counter" had really been invented or thought of. In later years, of course, good card counters became a problem for the gaming industry.

Note

1. Ruby Mathis was a co-owner of the Riverside, the Horseshoe, and other casino operations.

HARRAH'S TAHOE: DEALER TO PIT MANAGER

W*HEN DID you leave Harolds Club?*

I left Harolds Club in 1956. I was divorced from my wife, Eugenia, in about August of 1956, and, as oft happens with casino workers around town, I started drinking too much, and I was gambling probably more than I should have. One day I came to the conclusion that I have a college education—I have a degree in economics and business administration—and I should really “get with it” and put my education to use. So I resigned from Harolds Club in November of 1956 and went down to Modesto, California. My folks still lived in the small town of Hilmar, but I stayed with my brother, Leon, in Modesto. He knew some people that were starting a grocery store chain. After talking with them, we decided that with my accounting background and a business administration degree that I could be an asset to their business, but they wanted me to start on the ground level. They wanted me to start as a bag boy and a checker, which made sense to me; you should know the business from the ground up. So I went to work as a bag boy preliminary to being a checker and moving up into

management, but I *hated* the business. [laughter] I hated the grocery business completely. It was just too different a lifestyle. I did stay at the grocery store for about three months, and I was sitting in my brother's house one day in January 1957, and I thought, "I'm going to go down to that grocery store and tell them I'm quitting."

About one minute later the phone rings, and it's the manager of the store, and he wants me to come down and talk to him. So I go down to the store to talk to him, and he says, "Dwayne, I'm going to fire you. You're just not working out in this business."

I said, "That's fine. I really feel good about it, because I was just getting ready to quit anyhow." [laughter] So that was my short stint in the grocery business.

In the meantime, Harrah's Club had opened at Lake Tahoe in 1955, and there were two people working there that I had played baseball with in 1947 and 1948. Once again we get back to the influence of baseball on my life. One of the people working at Harrah's, Lake Tahoe, was Lee DeLauer. He was the office manager of a three-man staff. He was in personnel, payroll, and a little bit of everything. My other friend's name was Andy Marcinko. Andy played outfield on our baseball team, and he was the shift manager on graveyard. So Lee got me hired through personnel; I don't know exactly who he talked to. Andy put me to work dealing on graveyard. This was in February of 1957, and in those days the winters were very, very slow at Lake Tahoe. Most of the business during the wintertime was bus business, and the weekdays were very slow. The weekends were the only time that there was any business at all. So Andy said, "I can guarantee you two shifts a week—no more than two."

I would work graveyard Friday night, Saturday morning, and Saturday night, Sunday morning. I'd go to work at two o'clock Saturday morning and work until ten Saturday morning and then come back and work Sunday morning, two to ten, and I really only had those two shifts. The pay started at twenty dollars a shift.

Before I came to Lake Tahoe, my brother lent me enough money to buy a small house trailer. It wasn't even a house trailer; it was more of a camping trailer. It was an eighteen-foot trailer that I bought in Modesto and transported to Lake Tahoe to a

trailer court. There was practically *no* housing on the Nevada side and very little housing on the California side. In February of 1957 there was one grocery store, called Cecil's Market, that is still there, and there was only one motel of any size that was open year-round. A few people had bought small homes on the California side or were renting small apartments, but housing was a real problem.

Did Harrah's encourage their employees to live on the Nevada side, so that they could vote in Douglas County and have some influence there?

Yes, absolutely. In 1957 when I first went up there, it wasn't pushed that much because there was no housing available on the Nevada side, but within a year or two, I'd say, about 1959, 1960, Harrah's was pushing it very, very hard, and if you were a supervisor, it became almost mandatory that you live on the Nevada side. Of course, by 1959 and 1960, housing had opened up a little bit, and there was some housing available.

Did they ever say anything about how you voted, or did they just want to make sure you were an interested Nevada voter?

They just wanted us to be registered Nevada voters. I never heard anyone saying that we should vote for this or who we should vote for. The only time I really remember any vote pressure was one time in Harolds Club, and this had to be about 1955 or 1956, when Pappy Smith brought all the employees together for an employees' meeting. Walter Baring was there, and Pappy was encouraging us to vote for Walter Baring. That's the only really vote pressure that I ever heard of.

But to get back to Harrah's in 1957, housing was very, very tough. I don't know what I would have done, if I hadn't had that trailer. You can imagine being off work five days in the wintertime; there was snow on the ground continually during this time, and I basically had little money to spend. Tokes were almost nonexistent. I did a lot of reading, and I did a lot of crossword puzzles. That's when I first became involved with crossword

puzzles. I didn't really have any friends. The few people that I knew were some dealers on graveyard. The only person I ever hung around with much was a guy named Sharkey Begovich, who now owns Sharkey's Nugget in Gardnerville. Most of the graveyard people were older, very experienced dealers. They were the kind of guys that had worked in Palm Springs and Hot Springs. They'd worked in Kentucky, Steubenville, Ohio, and a few had come down from Montana. Clyde Bittner was working there at the time. He was one of the boys that came down from Montana with Warren Nelson in 1936. Clyde was a pit boss at Harrah's at that time and later became a shift manager. But, as far as friends, I didn't have many, and I had very little money.

My best chance was sometimes on Saturday mornings or Sunday mornings when I'd get off at ten o'clock. The day shift wouldn't have enough dealers to cover their tables, and they would ask me to work from ten in the morning until six at night. That was, of course, sixteen straight hours, what you'd call a double shift, and I did that quite a few times. At that time there was no such thing as overtime, and I would work sixteen hours for forty dollars. I worked the first eight for twenty and the second eight for twenty; overtime wasn't even thought of. I did make double tips, but they weren't much. A lot of times we'd have like an eight or nine-man crew on graveyard, and we'd wind up splitting as little as fifty cents apiece. [laughter] The whole shift split the tips, which was better for the crap dealers, because there were a lot of nights where you'd stand around dead all night, and you got zero, as far as tips on the crap table itself. Of course, this was in February. In March, April, May, things started getting better. By April I was getting three, four, sometimes five shifts a week, but the rest of the time I was just sitting in that trailer reading, listening to radio, and doing crossword puzzles.

My daughters were still in Reno, and I always managed to get down there one day a week. I would usually go down on Monday morning, and I missed very few Mondays. I always kept in contact with my children, because I thought that was very important, and, of course, it has proven to be very important over the years. As the business picked up in the spring, then I did get more dealing shifts, and when Memorial Day weekend came along, I was

promoted to a box man. In 1957 we had two box men on graveyard, and we had five crap tables, ten twenty-one's, one wheel, and one parimutuel wheel. That shows you what the ratio of games was then, as to what it is now. Now, that ratio would be something like fourteen twenty-one's and one crap table. The popularity of craps has died way down.

Sharkey and I were the two box men on graveyard, and when we came in at two in the morning, we almost always had four crap tables going, and on the weekend we'd have five crap tables going. The term box man, to the best of my knowledge, comes from the fact that the box man sits right behind where the drop box is, the drop box being the receptacle where the dealers dropped the money after someone buys in for chips. He is basically responsible for anything and everything that happens on that crap table. He's to make sure that the dice are rolled perfectly, that there's no cheating of any kind on the game, either by the outside players or the inside dealers, and that the payoffs are all made correctly by the dealers. My starting wage as a box man was thirty dollars a shift with no tips. So it wasn't a great promotion as far as money was concerned.

For a moment let's go back to when you were dealing on the graveyard shift at Harrah's in 1957. You said you had an old, experienced crew. Will you describe that crew?

Well, when Harrah's Club first opened in 1955 they had brought up some people from the Reno club that had worked for them there, but they had a problem finding dealers to work up at Tahoe, because Tahoe was traditionally a short-time operation. The lake casinos were usually just open from Memorial Day to Labor Day, and when Harrah's started hiring people to fill in the other spots, they hired whoever they could. When I went to work on graveyard, we had a lot of what I would call older dealers. They were in their fifties, and some of them even in their early sixties. Most of them had worked in illegal gambling places in their earlier days—places like Palm Springs, California, the foothills of California around Jackson and Sonora, Hot Springs, Arkansas, and clubs in Ohio, Virginia, and Florida. So these dealers had

worked in these illegal places, and they also had performed illegal maneuvers. In other words, there were deuce dealers. Deuce dealers are dealers who don't deal the top card. There were dice switchers and other sorts of manipulators. They had performed these illegal functions, because it was part of their job procedures. In many clubs in those days they *had* to work that way. So Harrah's had a lot of people like that working that were able to "Go for the money," as the expression goes. This meant that when a customer had a lot of money out, you had to go for that money; you had to get that money back. But when they went to work at Harrah's, they were strictly on the up and up; they were 100 percent honest. They didn't necessarily *want* to do these cheating things, and they didn't have to do them at Harrah's. The thing I want to stress is that Harrah's was always on the up and up, but in order to fill out their crews, they had to hire people that had those capabilities.

One of them was a guy named Sharkey Begovich. He had operated gaming houses in California that were pretty much illegal, in and around the Jackson, Sonora, Plymouth area. There was another old dealer called Joe Moreno, and they called him "Soap," because he was about as slippery and as smooth as a bar of soap. He probably taught me more about getting along with customers than anyone else ever did. He said, "All you have to offer a customer is a smile." He was extremely nice to customers and extremely well-liked by customers. So I was exposed to a lot of people like that. They were all good people, and they were all honest, hard-working people. Some of them had worked in Hot Springs, Arkansas, or they had worked on the gambling ships off the southern California coast, but now that gambling was becoming more legitimatized, they wound up working at Harrah's Club.

Who was Ed Carey?

Ed Carey was a fellow that came out of Lovelock, Nevada. He came to work at Harrah's as a dealer and eventually became a shift manager. Ed was a very capable man with a twenty-one deck. When you talk about a capable or a knowledgeable person, it

implies that the person has the ability and the talent to manipulate a deck of cards or a pair of dice. He could turn the deck, which is a form of cheating where, after you have dealt the cards and completed the hand, you pick up the cards and arrange them in such a manner that when you turn the deck completely over, you deal the same cards out again. Depending on if you're working with a player, or if you're working for an illegal gambling house, you deal the cards out in such a manner that whoever you want to win will win. Another thing that Ed could do was deal the second card in the deck. When a "seconds dealer" comes to a card that they want, he holds it until he needs it to make a hand.

Ed Carey told me a story about when he owned a little gambling joint in Fallon. One night when he was dealing he took a break, and when he came back from his break, a player had out probably about five hundred dollars, which was a lot of money. To Carey it could have been his whole bankroll. So he goes back in, takes the deck away from the dealer and starts dealing. Well, as he starts doing these various maneuvers that are illegal in order to get the money back, he looks up and there's a gaming control agent looking him right in the eye and watching the game. Well, Ed has to make a split-second decision: "Am I going to take a chance on cheating this customer and getting my money back, or am I going to deal a square game and lose my bankroll?" So he opted to deal a crooked game and deal seconds and get the money back from the customer, and the gaming control agent never did catch any of the moves. So the windup is that Ed saved his bankroll and saved his game, and the player lost the money back to the house.

We had people like that at Tahoe—probably twenty to thirty people—that were capable of manipulating a twenty-one game or a dice game, but never, never did it with management's knowledge or approval. The only time they did it in Harrah's Club was when they were cheating or stealing from Harrah's, and we had several of those, also.

There were some Las Vegas dealers that would come up to Lake Tahoe for the summer just to see how much money they could steal. If they were caught, they would just go back home. They were sent up there or allowed to come up there from Las

Vegas with the understanding that anything they could steal from Bill Harrah would be almost funny. They looked at it like a joke. If you could steal money from Bill Harrah, that was OK. Many people in Las Vegas thought that Bill Harrah was not too smart and not too sharp. They didn't think that he would last at all. They had the idea that they were much sharper and smarter than Bill Harrah. So some of the owners and operators in Vegas said, "Oh, go up there and see if you can make yourself some money at Lake Tahoe, and if you get caught, come on back."

When you were promoted to a box man on the graveyard shift, what was it like?

I don't know if I mentioned that from Memorial Day to Labor Day we worked seven days a week. The graveyard was fairly busy, especially on the weekends, and when we'd come in at two o'clock, we'd have four or five tables going. One reason the business was so good on graveyard was because Harrah's Club featured some great lounge acts in the early morning hours. One of the most popular lounge acts there that played from twelve midnight until four or five o'clock in the morning was Louie Prima and Keely Smith. They were one of the top lounge acts at that time in both northern and southern Nevada. Louie Prima and his group loved to shoot craps.

They would come over every break and shoot craps. Of course, any time an entertainer plays on a table, they always attract customers. Everybody wanted to say, "I played on the same crap table that Louie Prima did." That helped us a lot, because when Louie was in the lounge playing, then people would hang around the joint, and then when he stopped playing, he'd come out and play craps, and that created business in the pit. The Mary Kaye Trio was another big lounge act that played there a lot, and Bob Crosby also played there a lot on the graveyard shift. Quite a few of the entertainers played the games, as well as playing in the showrooms, and that helped the business.

At the end of that summer as business slowed down again, several people that had been promoted were cut down. In fact, Harrah's did away with box men during the wintertime, and a lot

of the people that had been floor men went back to dealing. Sharkey and I both went back to dealing. Sharkey stayed on graveyard, but I went on swing. I would work mostly swing, but once in awhile a day shift. It was tough to get five shifts a week. The business wasn't that good, and you just kind of got by with whatever work you could get.

Harrah's number one customer for many, many years was a fellow named Art Berberian. He played a lot of twenty-one, and he had lost quite a bit on twenty-one. So one day he decided he's going to play craps. He came in one day a little after twelve o'clock, and I was dealing the dice table on day shift that day with a fellow named Warren Dark. Art Berberian came up to our table, and he played very heavy money. In fact, that day he lost eighty thousand dollars on our table. Warren Dark was a very experienced dealer, and Warren and I stayed on that table from a little after noon until almost six o'clock at night. We only had a few minutes of break time to go to the restroom. When we were dealing that game, the shift manager came by and said, "Just deal the game any way you can," because Harrah's had a lot of rules, as far as procedures. They were very strict about how you handled come bets, and how you handled different bets. The shift manager said, "I don't care if you follow any of Harrah's Club's rules. Just keep the game going, and deal it fast. Try to get as many rolls of the dice as you can." So we paid totals; we paid off-and-on on come bets, and did all sorts of things that Harrah's Club didn't allow. As I say, we stayed on that table for probably close to six hours, and we were the only two dealers they let on the game. When Art was done playing—he'd lost the eighty thousand dollars—they let us off work, and we went home.

The next day the general manager, a fellow named Pat Francellini—who later shortened his name to Pat France—had a pit meeting. He had a meeting of all the dealers and pit bosses, and he said, "I'd like to thank Dwayne Kling and Warren Dark for dealing that dice game like they did yesterday and staying there as long as they did without a break. But," he says, "the one thing I want to stress is, I don't want you guys to ever do that again." He said, "You know, I was sitting up in the catwalk watching that game, and you guys didn't follow procedure at all." He said, "I'm

very disappointed in the way that you handled the game, as far as breaking all those rules and breaking the procedures. So from now on, I'm going to pay special attention to you guys to see that you do follow the rules and deal the game according to Harrah's Club procedures." I thought it was interesting that the guy lost eighty thousand dollars, and yet we didn't deal the game quite right, but it's a good example of Harrah's thinking. They wanted things done the right way: follow the rules.

Would you explain why not paying totals is important to procedures, and why Harrah's cared about it?

When you pay totals, your payoff is combined into one amount. In other words, if a player has a two hundred-dollar bet with two hundred-dollar odds on a four, he would have a payoff of six hundred dollars. So if you totaled that bet, you would just go out and put six hundred dollars there in one stack. You wouldn't break any of it down. Harrah's Club procedure would tell you that you took the two hundred dollars come bet out on the come line, and you paid the two hundred dollars bet. Then you would take the odds bet, and you would pay the two hundred twice, because four pays two-to-one. So the entire bet and the entire payoff would be laying there separately and laying there very visible, and it would be very obvious that it was the correct payoff. Anyone could see it was the correct payoff. When you did a total, you would just take the total amount of six hundred dollars and put it there in one stack, and it would be hard for anyone watching, especially from a catwalk, to see if the payoff was correct. Of course, every one of Harrah's Club policies and procedures, other than wearing apparel, was designed to protect the house, to make sure that the dealer was giving the correct payoff, and there wasn't any stealing going on.

Another thing I remember was, as I said earlier, you were lucky to get three or four shifts a week during the wintertime. One night I walked in on swing shift to deal, and the pit boss said, "I don't need any crap dealers. I don't have anything for you." He said, "All I need is one roulette dealer." He said, "You don't deal roulette, do you?"

I said, "Oh, yes, I deal roulette."

He said, "Oh, I didn't know that." He said, "OK, I'll keep you then. Take the day-shift girl off the table."

Actually, I had never dealt five minutes of roulette in my life. When I walked over to the roulette table, a girl named Nancy Kopanos was dealing. I knew her from Harolds Club, and she turned around to me and said, "Gee, Dwayne, I didn't know you knew how to deal roulette."

I said, "Hush, don't talk too loud." [laughter] I said, "I really don't know how to deal it." There wasn't a game. There wasn't a player on the table.

"Well," she said, "all you have to remember is if somebody bets a twenty-five-cent piece, a quarter . . ." She said, "A lot of people, they just walk by, and they'll drop a few quarters here and there on the table." She said, "A quarter pays \$8.75. Just remember that, and you'll be all right."

I had managed to spin the ball a little bit, so I spun the ball a few times, and then Sharkey, who was on the floor that night, came by and gave me these words of wisdom. [laughter] He said, "If anybody wins a big bet, and you're not exactly sure what it pays," he said, "just give them a few of the chips that they're playing, and then give them a couple of dollars, and then give them a few five-dollar chips, and then shove it out there, and if they look happy," he said, "that's fine, because they don't know the payoff, either." [laughter] He said, "Most of the pit bosses don't know the payoffs on roulette either."

So I managed to maneuver through about three or four hours on that roulette table. Then they closed the roulette table down, and I went and dealt twenty-one, which I wasn't real proficient at, either, at that time, because I'd learned that the same way. That was the *only* roulette dealing shift that I ever did in my entire life, and I was in the gambling business for over forty years. I dealt roulette for maybe three to four hours, and that was my roulette experience.



In the spring of 1958 Harrah's had expanded across the street and had taken over Sahati's Country Club, so they naturally needed a lot more supervisors. There was a fellow at Harrah's by

the name of Al Olsen, who was probably about fifteen years older than I was, and he had much more experience than I did. I found out later that he had run his own crap games in California and in Nevada, and he was a very experienced person—very knowledgeable and very well-liked. The rumors were that either Al Olsen or I were going to be named pit boss that week, and Al came up to me and said, “Listen, kid,” he said, “one of us is going to be made a pit boss tonight.” He said, “I want you to know, if I get the job, I’m going to work with you and be a good friend and help you out any way I can.” He said, “I’d like you to do the same thing if you go on the floor.”

I was very impressed and felt really good about it that this veteran old-timer would come up to me, a really young kid at that time, and talk to me like he did. Well, about a half hour later we were both working in the pit as box men, when Eldon Campbell, who was general manager of Harrah’s Club at that time, called Al and I both out of the pit, and he said, “Well, it was a tough decision. We didn’t know which one of you to promote, so we decided to make both of you a pit boss.” So we both started on the floor together, and I worked with Al off and on for several years after that. There was just a lot of camaraderie in those days. People worked together and helped each other a lot more than they do now.

Being a pit boss carries a lot of responsibility. You can work in the twenty-one area or the crap area or the roulette area. The shift manager that I worked for the most was Al Childers, and Al knew that my strong point was the craps table. So Al did something that a lot of the shift managers didn’t do: he assigned me just to that crap area. We had, on the Stateline Country Club side, five crap tables in that area and two box men. My responsibility as pit boss for Al was just to oversee the box men and the dealers in that crap area. As I said, that wasn’t commonplace in Harrah’s. Usually the pit boss was responsible for all the games, but Al was kind of superstitious. He would give me five sets of new dice to put in a game any time that I felt it warranted it. I would change the dice any time I wanted, not necessarily because I thought any cheating was going on, or that the dice were banged up or nicked. My job was to keep track of how the dice were rolling to see if they were

staying out a long time, and the players were winning a lot of money. He wanted me to switch the dice to change the luck of the players, and that was my main responsibility. If the dice were too hot, I would put in a set of dice that would, theoretically, change the luck of the player, luck of the shooter. [laughter] Also, if someone was playing heavily on the back side and winning, I was supposed to find a set of dice that were passing and put the passing dice in to beat the backline player. There was no illegitimacy of the dice: the dice were not flats, nor were they tops or bottoms; they were just completely 100 percent square dice; but Al believed so much in the theory that dice could change the run of the luck, that that was my first responsibility. I did that for about two months on swing shift. I worked every night on swing shift just in that crap pit.

Is that a superstition, or does it really work?

That's an age-old unanswerable question. My answer is: It's better to do something than not do anything at all. If the dice are running unlucky the way they are, why not take them out and put in some other ones? It's an unanswerable question, because now you never know what would have happened. You might have left the old set of dice in, and all of a sudden they would have started missing out, or vice versa. So my theory always was: It's better to do something than not do anything at all. There might be something the matter with the dice that you didn't know or didn't catch or didn't see, and somebody might have switched in some dice that you didn't see.

The same thing is true on a twenty-one game. When you changed the cards on a game—and this is what a lot of old-time pit bosses did, and they probably still do it now—you did it to change the luck of that table. That was the first thing I always did when I was a pit boss, shift manager, or a casino manager. My first question was, "Have you changed the deck?" It wasn't necessarily for the luck factor; I was changing the deck, so you knew you absolutely had a clean deck, a deck that wasn't marked or daubed or bent or crimped or something. By putting in a new deck you eliminated a lot of things you had to look for. If a table is losing

money, or something is going bad, you have to analyze that game and see why it is losing. The first thing I always looked for was: Is the deck OK? Is the deck clean? Is it our deck? The same way with the dice. So if you put in a new deck and a new set of dice, then that's one thing that you don't have to analyze or don't have to look for. So I guess that's a long answer to a short question, but I was always a little superstitious. Whether or not changing the dice helped or not, I really don't know, but it didn't hurt. [laughter]

How long did you have that job as floor man?

I went on the floor in the spring of 1958, and I was on the floor all through the summer. Once again, after Labor Day there were some demotions, and people were put back from pit boss to dealer. So I went back to dealing for, maybe, about a couple of weeks. Then, in about October of 1958 I went back on the floor again, and after that I never was put back dealing.

How much were you paid a shift then?

We started out at thirty-five dollars a day. If you don't mind, I'd like to return to 1957 and mention a couple of things that happened to me my first year at Lake Tahoe. As I said earlier, when I first got there I was almost broke and didn't work many shifts, but when I went on the box I worked seven days a week, saved as much as I possibly could, and at the end of the summer I had one thousand dollars put away. I thought, "Gee, I'm really doing good." By this time I'd gone on swing shift, and one night when I got off work at two o'clock in the morning, I went over to Harvey's Wagon Wheel and I started playing. Within two to three hours I lost the entire thousand dollars. I lost what I had on me, and then I went back to my trailer and got that money. [laughter] Then I borrowed some money, and I wrote a check, and I blew the thousand dollars that it took me over three months to save. I blew it in probably three hours. [laughter] I didn't gamble again for a long time!

Who was Ron Moore?

Ron Moore was a dealer that I'd worked with in Harolds Club. He had started out dealing the dime table just about the same time I had, but he left Harolds Club before I did, and I never really knew why. So one day I'm dealing dice at Harrah's Club, and there's this guy right next to my elbow, right on the end of the table. He's got a baseball cap pulled down over his head, and I dealt to him for about twenty minutes. When I go on a break, he leaves the table and follows me to the coffee shop where he pushes the hat back on his head and says, "You didn't recognize me, did you?"

I said, "No."

He said, "I'm Ron." Then I knew it was Ron Moore. He and I had been fairly friendly in Harolds Club, and he said, "I'd like to have coffee with you and meet you after work. We could go over to your place, and we could talk about something."

I said, "Sure, that's OK. That'd be good."

So he comes over to my trailer and proceeds to tell me that when he got hired into Harolds Club he was already a very sharp, smooth dealer. He had also been taught how to cheat all the table games. He had been hired in at Harolds Club as a shill—they had shills in the early 1950s—and then pretended he didn't know how to deal, so Harolds Club taught him how to deal. He dealt on the dime table a few months, and then he went to the dollar table. He said to me, "Dwayne, you never realized it, but when you and I were working together, I never went on a break that I didn't steal at least one or two chips off the table." He said, "I had agents working with me." Agents are people that a dealer will slough money off to or dump money off to. A dealer works in collusion with an agent, and they split the money when they get off the table. He said, "I stole *thousands* of dollars out of Harolds Club, maybe tens of thousands of dollars, before they ever caught me."

He was about my age, a clean-cut, young, good-looking guy, and he went around to different casinos and stole money one way or the other. In most cases he would work with a dealer to steal money off the table, and he wanted me to join what he called his "team" and work the various casinos to rip off, rob, and steal from them. That scared the hell out of me. I thought I don't even want

to talk to this guy, I don't even want to be seen around him. [laughter] I said, "No hard feelings, and I don't want any recriminations, but I don't want to get involved with that at all."

Ron "Whitey" Moore became a well-known established crossroader and cheater, and his picture was in all the "eighty-six" books. Eighty-six is a gambling term for people that are not allowed to come into or to play in a club. So Ron was eighty-sixed out of every place. He said, "See, I change my looks, and you won't even recognize me." He said, "You and I could walk into Harolds Club, and I'd put a disguise on you, or I'd put a hat on you, and I'd wear this and wear that, and nobody would ever know us." He said, "We'll make all kinds of money." As I said, I turned him down, and I didn't even want to talk to him after that, and, to my knowledge, I never did. [laughter]

Do you have another interesting cheating or stealing story from Lake Tahoe?

In the late 1950s, early 1960s, and for many years there was a stoplight on Highway 50, almost on the state border between California and Nevada, and between the two Harrah's clubs. One day I was working in the pit, and I see this car pull up to the red light in front of the club. The passenger throws the door open, jumps out of the car, comes running into Harrah's Club, races up to the dice table, reaches right across the dice table into the center rack, where there's probably eight hundred or a thousand dollars in twenty-five-dollar chips. He reaches right between the two dealers. It's a dead game and they're just kind of looking around not paying attention, and the guy grabs the thousand dollars in twenty-five-dollar chips, turns around, runs right back out the door again and jumps in the car. The signal light turns green about two seconds after he gets there, and the guys in the car headed on into California, and that was the last that anyone ever saw of them. [laughter] Talk about hit and run!

You were on the floor from 1958 through 1959. Could you kind of describe the work routine a little?

The big thing Harrah's always stressed was friendliness to the customers, but the pit boss's main job was to see that the dealers were following all of the many procedures. Dealers, among other things, had to shuffle the deck three to five times. They had to turn the deck once. When they dealt the game, the deck had to be held at a comfortable forty-five degree angle. When they gave someone a hit card, they did not drop their deck; they kept the deck at the same level the entire time; and their eyes had to be focused on the game the entire time. As a boss you would stand there and watch to see that all these procedures were followed, and, as we mentioned earlier, if all the procedures were followed correctly and perfectly, it was almost impossible for any cheating to go on between the player and a customer.

If a dealer did make a procedural mistake, we would tell the dealer about it. We tried to wait until the dealer got off the table and then call him aside and talk to him privately and say, "Gee, you aren't holding the deck high enough. I'd like you to hold the deck up a little bit more," or "You shuffled the cards eight times that time. You know you're only supposed to shuffle it five."

In conjunction with the floor men observing the games, there was also a catwalk system. The catwalk people or surveillance people, as they call them nowadays, were more concerned with watching procedure than they were about looking for any type of a cheating move. Most of them weren't trained or weren't skilled in the art of dealing. They were trained to follow the procedures. So if someone working in the catwalks saw a procedural mistake, he would call down and tell the floor men, "So-and-so on 3-21 is doing something wrong. Would you talk to him?"

In conjunction with that there was what they called a pit book kept in each pit, and whenever you corrected a dealer, you would enter that in the book. Also, when the catwalk people would call down, you were not allowed to tell the dealer that the catwalk called down and saw you doing this. You had to go to the dealer and say, "*I* saw you doing this, and *I* want you to stop doing it." In a lot of cases the dealer knew that you weren't even close to the table when it happened, so they knew it was coming from the catwalk, but procedure then was that you did not tell the dealer that it came from the catwalk; it came from you.

The floor men worked seven days a week during the busy summer. In fact, usually you were scheduled for overtime. One summer that I worked there I was scheduled for nine hours every day, but you might work ten, eleven, or twelve hours. During your work shift you only got one break a night. You got a one-hour break, so you'd either work three or four hours without a break and then get an hour, or else you'd work four or five hours before you'd get a break. It was pretty tough physically to work on the floor.

When you got that break, you had to rest, and you had to get something to eat, but you also had a job assignment. You had to tour the entire building inside and out to look for any deficiencies. The first thing you usually did was go outside to see that the marquee was properly lit up, and that all the words were spelled right, and none of the letters were blown down, or anything like that. You also had to go around and see that the sand containers where people put out cigarettes were cleaned out, and that they were in good shape. You would go through the landscaped area to see if any papers, trash or bottles had been thrown in the shrubbery or around the trees. Inside of the building you had to go to every men's restroom and see that they were clean, that there were towels in the dispensers, that there was toilet paper in the dispensers, and that the sinks and toilets looked clean. You would also go through the kitchen area to check that out, and you would go in the employees' recreation rooms to see that they were kept clean. You had a regular form that you had to fill out, and whether you noted any discrepancies or not, you had to fill out this form. Then you turned in your form to the shift manager, and he would turn it over to the maintenance person. You must realize that it wasn't just one pit boss that was doing it. Depending on the time of the year, there could be as many as ten to fifteen pit bosses working on that shift that were going out and checking all these things that I mentioned. Plus, the shift manager was checking all the areas, and, of course, the maintenance men were looking for discrepancies also. [laughter] That shows you how much emphasis Harrah's Club has *always* put on cleanliness and the neatness and appearance of the casino. So besides the job of overseeing the games, watching the dealers to see that they were

following procedure, and seeing that the customers were taken care of, and that the customers were not cheating, you also had the responsibility of seeing that the building looked good.

I was promoted to relief shift manager in 1960. At that time Harrah's still had two clubs. There was what was called the Lake Club, the original Harrah's Club, and there was Harrah's Stateline Club.

So I was shift manager in the Lake Club for two or three shifts, and I was shift manager in the Stateline Club, and then sometimes I would be a pit boss. So between the shift manager job and the pit boss job I was working seven shifts a week just about all the time.

That was a pretty rapid promotion.

There was a lot of expansion going on at that time. When I went to work there in 1957, Harrah's consisted of one club with sixteen table games. Soon afterwards, they took over the Sahati's Country Club and called it Harrah's Stateline Country Club. Games were being added all the time, and the pit was getting larger and larger. As the club expanded there were promotions being made, and I always handled myself well. I was always at work on time. I presented myself well. I was friendly with customers. I was knowledgeable of all the games by that time. I hadn't dealt anymore, but I had spent a lot of my own time learning more about the games. I was conscientious, worked hard, and I moved up the ladder fairly fast, starting as a box man in 1957, and then was named a shift manager in 1960. I was a low-key person. I wasn't flamboyant. A lot of people didn't even know I was around, but it seemed like I was always there when something needed to be done, and eventually, I was noticed.

How people got promoted in those days is hard to say. There was a certain amount of favoritism, and there was a certain amount of cliques at that time. There was a clique consisting of shift managers that played golf, and if you played golf, they would put in a word for you. Then there were about three managers that came from Fallon, and they had their favorites, and they would try and promote people from Fallon. There was another group of people that belonged to the Masons and the Shriners, and if you

belonged to the Shriners or the Masons, then they would help you get promoted. There was also a Chet Edwards group, and there was the Willie Musso group. The cliques were all pushing to get their guys promoted.

I didn't join any of the cliques or any of the groups. I started to play golf for awhile, because it was kind of the thing to do, but I dropped golf, because I didn't like it. It was too much of a political thing. I didn't dislike or like the Fallon people or the Masons. I didn't join the Masons. I didn't join the Shriners. I didn't get associated with Willie Musso or Chet Edwards. I didn't take sides. Somebody said, "Well, you got to take sides. You're going to have to get in a clique or group and go with it."

I never did; I just went on my own, independently. I know it wound up working to my advantage, because nobody ever said, "Ah, don't pick Dwayne, he's with that Fallon group," or "Don't pick Dwayne—all he does is play golf." I wound up getting my jobs and my promotions on my own merit. Then, of course, I think that I did a good job when I did get the promotions.

I was working as a relief shift manager when they created a new position called pit manager. I wasn't considered for the pit manager position, because I was too low-key, and not enough people knew me. The first pit manager at Tahoe was a guy named John Lengel. John blew the job when he got in a beef with a dealer, and the dealer punched John in the nose. [laughter] Harrah's didn't figure that pit managers and supervisors should be engaged in fisticuffs, so they demoted John.

They made Lee Gerard the second pit manager of Harrah's Club at Lake Tahoe. They also decided that the pit manager job was too big for one individual, and they decided they should have an assistant pit manager. I was named assistant pit manager, and this is how it happened: One day I'm working as a pit boss, and the head of personnel comes to see me. His name was Frank Costa, and he came by the pit and said, "Can you come up to the coffee shop with me? I would like to sit down and have a cup of coffee with you."

I thought, "I don't know why he would want to talk to me." So I said, "Well, I'm working." I said, "I just can't go to the coffee shop and sit and visit with you."

He says, "Oh, I've talked to the shift manager. It's OK. They're going to cover for you."

So we go up to the coffee shop, and he had, of course, read my job application. He knew I'd graduated from college. He knew I had a little educational background, and he'd seen my job folder. Harrah's used to do a lot of evaluations all the time, and mine were all good. He said, "We almost missed you when we were going through the candidates, because you're so quiet and so low-key that no one had that much to say about you." We talked for about twenty minutes or so, and he offered me the job. The personnel manager offered me the job as assistant pit manager. Of course, I took it in a minute. I thought it was interesting that personnel would make a promotion like that. No other casino at that time would have handled it that way.

What year were you promoted to assistant pit manager?

I was promoted to assistant pit manager in 1961. I worked in that position for about a year, and then Lee Gerard was promoted, and I became the pit manager.

How much did the assistant pit manager and pit manager earn?

The assistant pit manager was paid forty dollars a day, and the pit manager was paid fifty dollars a day. The pit manager's job was a very big job, and it was a time-consuming job. I would go in around eight o'clock in the morning. During the daytime at Harrah's Club at that time, department managers and even the general manager always wore a sweater to work. You didn't have to wear a suit during the daytime. You'd go to work in a pair of slacks, a shirt and tie, and a golf sweater—and not necessarily a tie.

I had my own office on the executive level, and the first thing that I looked at was the wage-ratio report. The wage ratio was the ratio between the wages and the amount of drop that you had in the pit. The drop is the amount of money that's in the drop box, the amount of money that customers have bought into the games. There wasn't that much credit play, so your entire pit revenue



Dwayne Kling's business card from his pit manager position at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.

came from the cash drop that was in that box. The wage ratio was figured both for the individual shifts and for the twenty-four hour period. To determine the ratio, you divided the wages by the drop. At that time Harrah's was looking for a wage ratio figure around 4.5, 4.4. That was the very first piece of information you picked up when you went to work. One of your main jobs was to keep that wage ratio in line. Everyone was very aware of that figure. The wage ratio could be a very tricky and a very misleading figure sometimes. Sometimes you might have to have several tables open, but you're dealing to all small play, so you would have a high wage ratio. Other times you can have the same amount of tables open, but because you have big money being played, your wage ratio will look good. On an overall basis, the wage ratio proved to be accurate the vast majority of the time.

As I said, you got the wage ratio for each shift and for a twenty-four hour period. The wage ratio was a little bit higher on graveyard due to the lack of volume, and a little bit higher on day shift, but on swing shift you really had to keep it right on line. If the wage ratio was out of line, then it was the pit manager's responsibility to contact the shift's supervisor and say, "You're using too many people," or "Cut the schedule down," or "How

come you had sixty people working yesterday? You could have gotten by with fifty.” The pit manager was a ramrod on scheduling, and he checked all the dealers’ schedules. He didn’t schedule the dealers, but he worked with the pit shift supervisor and told him how many people he would have every day.

The pit manager also scheduled the pit bosses, but he was not involved in the purchasing of dice, cards, uniforms, or aprons. The pit manager did oversee the hiring of all dealers. It was pretty much of a generic hiring, however, because, by the time that I was pit manager, most of the dealers came out of the dealers schools. We had dealers schools several times a year, mostly in the spring. We would schedule the schools according to how many dealers we anticipated we would need. If someone was hired from outside of the club, then they definitely had to be approved by the pit manager, and any promotion from dealer to box man or box man to pit boss had to be OK’d by me, cleared by me, and recommended by me as pit manager.

So with those administrative duties I kept busy during the daytime. Around four o’clock I would go home, take a shower, have dinner, and change clothes. I would come back to work around seven or eight o’clock at night. I’d have on a nice suit or sport coat and be dressed top of the line. First thing I did was go through the pit area to see who was playing, if there were any good customers playing, and who was on the tables. Then I would check the South Shore Room to see what good customers were there, who had been comped, who was sitting in various locations, et cetera. I would check with the maître d’, and he, of course, could tell me that Art Berberian was sitting on table eighteen, or Alex Spanos was sitting on table twenty-two. You would go down to that table, and if you didn’t know them, you would introduce yourself and say, “Hi, how are you doing?” In most cases the pit manager and the shift managers knew the player, because it was part of your job to know the good players. You would visit with the special guests and, of course, see that they were happy and satisfied with all their accommodations. Then you would come out and go to the pit area again, and you would check with the pit shift supervisor to see that he had enough tables open and that he was prepared to open more tables when the show broke.

We had a certain area in Harrah's at that time that we called pit three, and we would open those tables just prior to the show break. With Bill Harrah you always knew that the show was going to break when it was scheduled to break, so we made certain that all the tables were open as the crowds were coming out of the South Shore Room. Another thing that the entertainment department did was to schedule a headliner, a well-known star, in the lounge at about the time the show broke. So say, for example, they came out of the show and Sammy Davis Jr. had appeared. They'd be walking out of the show, and they would be going by all these tables, and then they would possibly say, "Well, let's go home," or "Let's go across the street." Just about that time the headliner would come on stage in the lounge. They'd stop and listen, and one thing led to another. Entertainment was a very important part of Harrah's, and it definitely determined when we opened more tables and when we scheduled extra help.

Harrah's used two levels of entertainment to capture their customers: one to get them there, and then the others to keep them there. Even someone as big as Harry James with his full band played in that lounge. The Platters were another group that played in the lounge. Another purpose of the lounge was to entertain a good customer's wife. If someone was playing on one of the pit games, and his wife was kind of getting upset or antsy or ready to leave, we would escort her into the lounge, so she could sit and watch the act in the lounge. A husband is going to play differently, if he's playing without his wife watching. [laughter] If a guy's trying to play money, and his wife's looking over his shoulder, it's going to affect his gambling action. So that was another reason for good lounge entertainment.

You had been promoted to pit manager in 1962?

Yes, early in 1962.

And then you were demoted?

Yes, the demotion ties in with the long hours that you put in as a pit manager or any upper management job in Harrah's Club

at that time. You were expected to work at least ten hours on an average day, and you usually came in, even on your day off. So it was a time-consuming job.

One day we had some new procedure or new policy that we wanted to talk about to every dealer, and being the pit manager, of course, I conducted every meeting. We'd had two meetings for the day shift and two for the swing shift and two for the graveyard, so that day I'd probably spent a minimum of eighteen hours in Harrah's, conducting meetings and doing my regular duties. When the graveyard dealers' meeting was over, the graveyard shift went to work, and it was after midnight by this time. So I thought, "Well, I'll go have a drink at the bar." After I had had about two or three drinks, Hank Decker, who was the number one pit shift supervisor on graveyard at that time, came over and wanted to talk business to me. He felt that more of his dealers should have a raise, and that they weren't getting paid enough money. Of course, I was the one that was keeping them from getting a raise. So we got to talking, and the conversation got pretty heated, and, as I said, I'd had a couple of drinks and said things that I shouldn't have said, and not in a very professional manner.

Are you saying you lost your temper, and you swore at him?

[laughter] Possibly. I don't remember exactly what all I did wrong, but I know I decided to go home and go to bed. The next morning early—I don't know how early it was—the phone rang. I was still asleep. On the other end of the telephone was Curly Musso, who was general manager of Harrah's at that time. He said, "Dwayne, come in right away. I want to talk to you." Well, I knew I was in trouble, because I wasn't exactly sure what I said to Hank, but I knew I shouldn't have been saying anything.

So I went in to talk to Curly, and Curly said, "Well, you've been doing a good job and everything, Dwayne, but," he said, "you acted unprofessional last night. You didn't act like a Harrah's Club department manager, so I'm going to demote you back to regular pit boss."

I said, "Fine, that's OK with me. If that's what you want to do, that's what we'll do."

So I went back to the pit and worked probably about two months as a pit boss. Then the pit manager they had put in there left or got a transfer or got promoted or something, so Curly asked me if I would go back as pit manager again. Of course, I was very happy to do that. So I went from pit manager to pit boss to a pit manager all within a two-month time frame. That experience taught me one very important lesson that I remembered all my life: When I'm off work, I don't talk business, and when I'm at the bar, I definitely never talk business. The way I feel, when you're high in management, if you're in the club, you're working—whether you're scheduled to work, or whether you just came in to visit with somebody. Any time top-level management is in a casino, they are *working*, whether they realize it or not. The way you conduct yourself and what you say when you're in the club has a lot to do with your job performance.

In the culture at that time lots of the casino owners and senior management drank. Did you question whether or not you ought to be having a drink in the club, at all?

I didn't question it. From then on, I never stopped for a drink in the club. If I had a drink, I would have one drink and be right out the door real quick. I learned the hard way, although it didn't wind up hurting me that much. Regardless of what anyone else did, I just didn't have a drink anymore after that.

There was one general manager at Harrah's named Pat Francellini, later known as Pat France, who used to hang around the bar a lot when he was working. He didn't drink, but he would visit with the employees that were drinking at the bar, and he'd buy a lot of drinks at the bar. He felt that he gained a lot of his information there. He would use the bar as an information source. He'd find out what people were complaining about, or they might start saying something about another supervisor or about the way the games were scheduled or just about anything. That was one of his ploys, to hang around the bar and listen to his employees.

Drinking at the bar was not frowned upon at Harrah's, but any time you hang around the bar drinking a lot, you can get in

trouble. There were a few pit bosses and a few supervisors that did things they shouldn't do and wound up getting demoted or terminated because of it.

This seems to illustrate that you're very controlled, and you don't like to make mistakes, and when you do something like this, you change your behavior completely, to make sure that you don't do it again.

Yes, that is one of my characteristics. I've made a lot of mistakes in my life, but I've learned from just about all of them, and there are not too many that I've done twice. [laughter]

After you were renamed pit manager, how long did you stay in that position?

I probably stayed there about a year. I wound up leaving Harrah's in November of 1963, right about the time of the John F. Kennedy assassination. Looking back on it, it's one of the few regrets I have in my life. I just decided it was best for me to leave Lake Tahoe. I don't know if I mentioned this earlier or not, but I had remarried Eugenia in about 1960. She'd been living in Reno when we remarried, and she moved up to Tahoe, and since she had been a twenty-one dealer in Harolds Club, she became a twenty-one dealer at Harvey's Wagon Wheel. We preferred not to work in the same establishment, so she worked across the street. We were married that second time for about three years, and the marriage didn't work out that time, either. So that was another incident that had a bearing on my life. I'd always wanted to go back to Reno, because I enjoyed the climate and the work more in Reno, so after the divorce I left Harrah's Tahoe in November of 1963. If I had to do it all over again, I might have been better off if I had stayed at Harrah's Tahoe, although I had a great life in Reno. Eugenia and our daughters stayed at Lake Tahoe for many years. She moved back to Reno probably in 1969, something like that.

When I first went to Tahoe, every Monday I would drive down to Reno to spend time with the kids. Now, seven or eight years later, I reversed, and I drove from Reno to Tahoe to see the kids.

[laughter] So that was something that I always did. Monday night was always Dwayne and the kids for many years.

You worked at Harrah's for almost seven years? What did it mean to you and your career development? What was the significance of Harrah's to you?

It was the most educational time, as far as gaming is concerned, in my entire life. As I mentioned earlier, when I first went up here I met these old-time dealers that had worked in all kinds of different establishments. Also, as Harrah's changed, all the young bright college boys and college girls came, and so the personnel of Harrah's changed. It became a more dignified and a more respectable place to work. It was exciting for me to go to work and be involved with the entertainers. There was always a big name entertainer there, and you always had contact with them on one level or another. I met people there that I still see all the time. Harrah's also gave me a lot of training, as far as management procedures, in what was important in the gambling business.

Was that formal training? Did they send you off to class?

They did later on. They sent people to class, but when I left there in November of 1963, there weren't any such things as training seminars or management seminars.

What kind of an employee do you think you were for Harrah's?

I think I was a really good employee. I was very conscientious. I did my best at all times. I feel that if you are working for someone, you give them the absolute best that you have. If you can't give someone at least 100 percent, then you shouldn't work for them. That happened to me a couple of times later on in my life. In my later years I wasn't happy with who I was working for, and, rather than prostitute myself or change my work style, I left the organization. I made mistakes, everyone does. As I mentioned, I got drunk sometimes, or I lost some money

sometimes, but it was nothing, in most cases, really detrimental to the job. So I think I was a very good employee.

Could you tell us briefly your feelings of the six years you spent at Tahoe?

Well, when I first went to Tahoe in February of 1957, I wanted to get out of Modesto, California. I wanted to get back into the gaming business. That was what precipitated my move there. I didn't have any deep thoughts about going to Harrah's and making a career out of it; I just wanted to get back into the gambling business. The first couple of years I was at Harrah's, I was just working to survive. As the years went by, and the rapid growth and rapid expansion came along, it was easy to see that there was a chance for advancement, a chance for promotion, and a chance to make good money. It was also a difficult job to work, because Harrah's Club demanded a lot of you. Of course, I was the type of person that I gave of myself a lot. If they wanted 100 percent, I tried to give them 101 percent or more. I don't know if it was innate with me, or if it was something that developed through Harrah's Club, but I think I'd always been conscientious, as far as trying to please people and trying to give them a good day's work for a good day's pay. At the time, I didn't really think that much of anything outside of the pit. Some of the people I knew, like Lloyd Dyer, Holmes Hendricksen, Doyle Mathia, and Denny Small—they spread out more into upper management. Looking back on it, another thing I would have done is not concentrate entirely on the pit. Most of the general managers did not come out of the pit. I wasn't preparing myself or looking at the big picture at the time.

Of course, the pit at that time was the heavy-duty department and made more money than the slot department or, of course, the keno department. So a lot of your power came from the pit, but you were limited by being in the pit. You weren't getting the overall picture of how the operation worked. At that time, and still to this day, I love the pit. What makes a real casino is your pit area, your table games area. I was having an enjoyable time working in the pit, and I was having an enjoyable time seeing the entertainers

and just having a good life there. I guess I wasn't old enough at the time to realize the potential at Harrah's Club.

Now, I would like to focus on Harrah's and the organization. Why don't we start with who Bill Harrah was to you. Who was Bill Harrah? What was he like? What did he do?

I first met Bill Harrah in 1947, when I came up here to play baseball. Bill Harrah wasn't a person that got close to people. I knew him those few years playing baseball, and then I worked for him for seven years, and in that entire time, I think, one time he waved at me. He stuck his finger out as he went by, but I'm not even sure of that. He wasn't the kind of person that would come in and talk and visit with people in the pit, but when he came around, he seemed to generate respect for some reason. When he would come to the lake, he usually would have Bob Ring with him. Later, in 1960, 1961, Rome Andreotti would always come with him. Bill Harrah would always walk in front, and Bob Ring and Rome would usually walk about a step behind him.

I remember him as being about six foot two, and probably around one hundred eighty-five to one hundred ninety pounds, always meticulously dressed, gray hair combed straight back, with almost plain steel-rimmed glasses. I never remember him talking, hardly at all. He would just walk by, and everybody was in awe of him. He seemed to communicate mainly with Bob Ring and Rome Andreotti in the times that I was up there from 1957 to 1963. If a light was out, or if a carpet was dirty, he would make like a barely perceptible move to Bob Ring or Rome, and then the problem would be taken care of. Usually, whenever he walked in the building, the shift manager would be notified some way or other. I don't know how they got ahold of the shift managers, but the shift manager would always appear and walk around with that same group.

You were relief shift manager? In that role did you ever get to walk around with him?

Never. No, I never did. I worked mainly all swing shifts, and about the only time he would ever come to Tahoe on the swing

shift was when he would go to a dinner show, and, of course, he did go to every opening night.

So you did see him frequently?

I would see him, yes.

I've heard stories that someone would call Tahoe when he left Reno.

That's right. I'd forgotten about that. Yes, they did alert the Harrah's people at the lake.

And then everybody would just try to clean up everything and make sure everything was right?

Yes, everyone would check to see that all the lights were on, and a concerted effort was made to see that the club was nice and clean.

How was it possible then, that every time he walked in, he would see something wrong?

It says something about Bill Harrah. What was good enough for you wasn't good enough for Bill Harrah. There was a shift manager by the name of Hal White who said, "As soon as he walks in the door, three lights burn out." He says, "I've looked at those lights for the last eight hours. They were all burning. He walks in the door, and one goes out." [laughter] Well, of course, the real story is that the light was out all the time, but Hal White, or whoever the shift manager was, did not see that the light was out.

Everyone has different levels of perfection. Your shoes might be shined good enough for you, but maybe they weren't shined good enough for Bill Harrah, or your shirt is ironed nice enough for you, but it wasn't nice enough for Bill Harrah. He expected perfection, and when you're trying to please someone that's tough to please, then you wind up doing a better job yourself. I think one of the reasons he got so much out of people was that he didn't go around and say, "Oh boy, you really did a good job." He would look

kind of noncommittal, so a good, conscientious, loyal employee tried to do a little bit better, so that they could gain some recognition or some acknowledgment or some kind of a thank-you from Bill Harrah.

Do you think that was natural, or do you think that he developed a style that would get people to always try to achieve more?

I think most of it was natural, but I also feel that he must have been perceptive enough to realize that he was getting a lot more things done by acting the way he did. A lot of people have said that when he asked you or told you to do something, he didn't tell you how to do it. He just said this is what you're going to do, and it was up to you to get it done and to get it done the right way. I, of course, didn't have any personal experience with him that way, at all, but when he wanted a job done, he didn't want you to ask him *how* he wanted it done; he just wanted you to get it done.

There's a basic conflict in my mind about Harrah's. It was the most procedural property in gaming: every detail about a procedure was written in policy and followed exactly. Conversely, Bill Harrah said nothing, except, "I want it clean, and there's a light out." And people did their best to achieve that. How is that possible?

I think a lot of it was because of the type of people that worked for him. If they were given the slightest indication that he wanted something done, they would go out of their way to get it done. It wasn't like he *had* to tell them to do it. A lot of people were tested and fell along the wayside. If somebody didn't work out, he wasn't hesitant to get rid of them and find somebody that did.

But he didn't do that. Somebody below him did that. He only worked with the top two or three people, right?

Right. I think Rome Andreotti probably had as much to do with it as anyone, as far as things being done the proper way, and Rome had control over several departments. Bob Ring was

president in the early 1950s, but Bob Ring was not that much of an administrative person; he was more of a “people” person. This is just conjecture, but perhaps in that period of the early 1950s, after they became more efficient, Bill Harrah and Bob Ring had a lot of conversations, and Bob Ring passed Bill’s ideas down the chain of command.

At one level Harrah’s gave lots of rewards and recognition for everything anybody did. They recognized every little promotion. Almost anything anybody did was written up in the Harrah-scope.¹ At another level, here’s Bill Harrah that walks through, doesn’t say anything to anybody, looks over, glances at a light, and everybody panics and makes sure that they fix it. So, on one hand, you have an owner who doesn’t say anything to his employees, and, on the other hand, you have a company that goes out of its way to do everything to recognize everyone. How did it happen?

Lloyd Dyer has said that Harrah’s was run by committee. There was a management committee, there was an entertainment committee, and so on. So I think a lot of procedures were established in those management meetings, and it would be up to the general managers to pass it down to the department heads.

Can you describe the property when you started in 1957, and what it grew into by 1963?

I first went to Harrah’s in February of 1957, and they had opened the club in June of 1955. They had bought George’s Gateway Club from a gentleman named George Cannon and his partner, Phillip “Curly” Musso. It was a remodeled Quonset hut. [A Quonset hut was a type of structure developed during World War II by the military. They were used to house everything from personnel to airplanes.] When I went to Harrah’s in February of 1957 we had ten twenty-one games, one roulette, and five crap tables. The interesting part of that was the ratio of crap games to twenty-one games; it was two twenty-one’s for every crap table. Nowadays the ratio is more like twelve twenty-one’s for every

crap table and maybe even more than that in some places. A crap game was a very popular game then, much more popular than it is today.

Rome Andreotti, when I went to work there in 1957, was a shift manager, and shortly after that he was transferred to Reno. The shift manager who took his place was Curly Musso. Curly later became general manager. As I said earlier, Curly was one of the people that Harrah's bought the business from, and part of the sale agreement was that Curly Musso would have a job as long as he wanted one with Harrah's Club.

A certain amount of Harrah's employees were people from Reno who moved to the lake when Harrah's opened. This resulted in a major policy change for Harrah's. Prior to opening at the lake, husbands and wives could not work together, but when they came to Tahoe they decided they had to let a man and his wife work together, because there weren't that many other jobs at the lake. So if Harrah's had a pit boss that was married to a twenty-one dealer, which a lot of the guys were in those days, they almost had to let them work together.

There were also a lot of people hired from Las Vegas, Fallon, and Lovelock, and a lot of people were hired that had worked in places that weren't legal, places such as Palm Springs, California; Hot Springs, Arkansas, and so on.

The big thing I remember was the extreme difference in business between summer and winter. Memorial Day came along, and you worked seven days a week. The women would get a day off, but the men would work seven days a week from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Then in the wintertime, when the snow would come along, you would be fortunate to get forty hours of work. You usually only got two to three days of work a week.

Procedures were enforced even in 1957. They weren't quite as strict or quite as refined as they became over the years. Our pit procedure manual in those days was probably seven or eight pages, and now it's got to be seventy or eighty pages, or probably more. As different situations came along, the pit procedure book was added to, as were the procedural books in all of the rest of the departments, of course.

When you left Harrah's you've estimated that there were four hundred people in the pit, including thirty-five pit bosses. How many were there in 1957?

I would say in the summer of 1957 there were probably about 125 people working in the pit. During the roughly seven years I was there the number of crap tables doubled. We had five when I started, and there were ten when I left. The big increase was in the twenty-one games. There were ten of them when I went to work there, and six years later there were sixty twenty-one games.

In 1958 Harrah's had expanded across the street and acquired what was formerly known as Sahati's Stateline Country Club and renamed it Harrah's Stateline Country Club. By 1959 the Stateline Country Club was *the* main club. In 1958 we would close the Stateline Club in the wintertime and leave the Lake Club open, and in 1959 we kept the Stateline Club open and closed the Lake Club in the wintertime. Eventually, around 1966, Harrah's sold the property to Harvey Gross of Harvey's Wagon Wheel.

On December 15, 1959 they opened the South Shore Room with Red Skelton as the opening act. The opening of the South Shore Room was the real beginning of the major expansion and growth of Harrah's Club, because it exposed Harrah's to the world. It was a tie-in to the Squaw Valley Winter Olympics in 1960. The showroom opened in December of 1959, and there were tens of thousands of people who heard about Lake Tahoe, Squaw Valley, the Olympics, and Harrah's Club all through one combined advertising program.

I tried to identify what I thought were some of the key elements in Harrah's success, and I'll save entertainment, because it's a longer discussion, but I have some others: food service, hotel, advertising, buses, golf. Pick one that you think is important, maybe buses, and tell us what role they played from your perspective.

The bus program was what made Harrah's Club. Without the bus program, I'm sure Harrah's Club would have failed, or at best,

it would have been a seasonal operation. A lot of people have taken credit for starting the bus program, and a lot of people have taken credit for making it work, so I won't go into that, because it's pretty well chronicled in a few other interviews that have been done. I will say scheduling was based on how many buses were coming in, and those buses came in during the worst possible snowstorms you can imagine. If you found out the road was closed, and that the buses were canceled, you immediately started sending dealers home or calling people up at home and telling them not to come in. Harrah's supervisors had no qualms about sending people home. If there's no work, there's no work. It wasn't done as a heartless gesture; it was done as a business-like gesture. If the buses aren't coming through, then we aren't going to have any business, and we aren't going to pay you to stand around on an empty table.

How many buses a day would they bring in?

I don't really know. It would vary according to the time of the year and according to how active the bus program was at that time. I believe they started out with just San Francisco and the Bay area. Then they later moved into the Sacramento, Stockton, and Lodi area. I would say that sometimes there would be as many as ten or twelve buses and sometimes just one or two buses. An average bus would have thirty-eight people on it.

Do you know what Harrah's gave people as an incentive to take a bus to the lake?

I don't remember the cash amount. I think the way it worked was that the passenger would buy a bus ticket in the city that they were leaving from, and when they got to Harrah's Club, they would be refunded the price of that ticket, or sometimes half the price of the ticket. They would also receive a meal ticket and a free drink ticket.

Did buses come on weekends, too?

Buses came seven days a week during the winter months. The buses were Harrah's lifeline, and they were also the dealer's lifeline, because it is the same old story. If the club isn't making any money, then the individual isn't making any money. The pit bosses were very aware of the buses coming up and scheduled accordingly. You were really hoping those buses got through, if you were a dealer, because that meant you got to work another shift or two, and it meant you would make some more money. Now there's some animosity towards bus people.

Now dealers think they don't tip, and they don't play pit games, but at that time you didn't feel that way about them?

They didn't feel that way about them, because the tips weren't that big a concern in those days. We relied more on wages than tips. Nowadays people rely on tokens or tips much more than they did then. We simply wanted bodies in that pit, so that we could get as much work as possible. We had no real animosity towards the bus customers. We definitely looked forward to the buses coming in.

Was Harrah's special in the way they treated customers?

Well, I can hardly think of Harrah's without thinking that the customer was the most important thing you had. The customers were treated with a tremendous amount of respect and given all kinds of service. You bent over backwards to do what you could for someone. Everyone strived to do the best they could for the customer, give them everything that they wanted or needed. Cases of being rude to customers were very rare indeed. Of course, part of it was the era that we were living in. I think most people in the 1950s and 1960s were more polite and more courteous than they are now.

Did they teach it, or was it natural? How did you communicate to a dealer, or to a pit boss, if you were the pit manager? How did somebody communicate to you how to treat customers?

It came from your immediate supervisor, whatever level you were on. Pit bosses made sure that you were friendly and polite. There were a few smart aleck dealers and a few smart aleck pit bosses, but they heard about it in a hurry, either from the shift manager or the pit manager. All the procedures stated several times that the customer comes first. There were no specifics; it didn't spell out what you had to do, or what you couldn't do. Make them feel at home, make them feel welcome—those were things that you hear about in the casino business all your life, and some clubs practice it, and some clubs just preach it. It was almost like osmosis. It seemed like it just spread through the building. Very seldom did you have to chastise a dealer. I remember there was an older dealer who had worked at Harrah's in Reno before coming to Tahoe, and she was what you would call a hard-nosed twenty-one dealer. In 1957 and 1958, if you didn't have any customers, you could smoke, stand right there at the table and smoke. Well, this girl would light a cigarette and leave it burning in the ashtray, and if a customer came up and wanted to play, she would do everything she could to discourage his play. She would even go as far as picking up the cigarette and blowing the smoke in the customer's face, to try and run him off. Finally, somebody took her off the table and said, "If you don't start putting those cigarettes out and start being more friendly to the customers, then you're out of here. You're history." When you saw things like that, you took action on them, and you corrected them right away. Harrah's Club used to back up their supervisors 100 percent, right or wrong, and a lot of times they were wrong, but you still backed them up.

In Harrah's it was taken for granted that everyone was friendly, but not every club was like that. Some other clubs were notoriously rude. The Bank Club, the Golden Bank Club, the Palace Club, none of those put forth a friendly atmosphere, and they all eventually went out of business.

Were the employees happy with their jobs?

I don't know if "happy" is the correct word or not, but they were pleased. It was a pleasant place to go to work. There were a

lot of limitations, as far as your dress and your dealing procedure was concerned, but, in general, I would say that people enjoyed going to work, to a degree. More people left Harrah's because of low pay than any other reason.

What role did food play in the success of Harrah's?

Not a big role in those days. Harrah's didn't have any kind of a gourmet restaurant. Harrah's Club had a coffee shop when they first opened, but even when they expanded across the street and put in a very nice, large coffee shop, there was no gourmet restaurant.

The only nice dining room in Harrah's at that time was in the South Shore Room. We would comp good players into the South Shore Room, but I don't recall comping players in our coffee shop. In those days when the customer would ask for a cocktail, you would call the cocktail waitress over, and they would have to purchase their own drinks. If they were good customers, or if you were being gracious, you would call the girl over and announce to the table that Harrah's Club or Dwayne Kling wanted to buy you a drink. Free drinks didn't become automatic until the middle 1960s, at the earliest. In the 1950s you were really giving a customer something when you gave them a free drink or offered them a free drink. Now, of course, it's become automatic, and if a playing customer had to buy a drink, he would be very upset.

I think it was very effective when Harrah's bought a drink the way they did. It made the customer feel important, and it made them feel like you were doing something for them. It made them feel recognized, which to me is one of the key things in almost every business, but especially the gambling business. You have to make the customer feel appreciated and feel recognized.

Talk about the gaming a little bit. You've described the table games pretty accurately, but we don't have a picture at all of the slots. How important were they? How many were there?

Well, being a pit boss, born and raised in the pit, the slots were not that important to me—not that they weren't important. It was

just that I was focused solely on the pit department. I wasn't really concerned with the slot department. The only thing I remember about the slots was that they were all Pace machines, and they were all silver chrome-colored machines. All Harrah's had for many years were Pace slot machines.

As a shift manager did you have to approve any jackpots in the slots?

No, we did not. In those days the jackpots weren't that big. Most of them were hand paid by the jackpot payoff person or the key men. Jackpots didn't get huge until much later. I remember when I was in the Horseshoe Club in 1982 that the biggest jackpot in the Horseshoe at that time was \$1,250.00. At Harrah's when I was there in the late 1950s, early 1960s, off the top of my head, I doubt if there were any jackpots over \$500.00. The standard dollar slot machine had a \$150.00 jackpot. The nickels were \$7.50, the dimes were \$15.00, the quarter machine was \$37.50, the half-dollar machine was a \$75.00 jackpot, and the dollar machine was \$150.00. Those figures remained the same for years and years. We didn't have that many good customers that were slot players that I was aware of. The standard cliché used to be that the husband would play the pit games, and the wives would play the slot machines, and it was pretty much true, but, as I say, I was focused on the pit, and I really wasn't that cognizant of the slot department.

What other gaming was there?

Bill Harrah opened a sports and race book in 1957 in what was then called the Stateline Country Club. The person he brought in to run it was Fred Vogel. Fred Vogel was from Venice, California, and—I didn't find this out until many years later—Fred Vogel's mother, Mrs. Vogel, lent Bill Harrah a sizeable amount of money in 1955 when he opened up the club at Lake Tahoe. Fred Vogel, Bill Harrah, and Bob Ring were all good friends. They used to hang out together in southern California, and they hung out together at Lake Tahoe a lot. Whenever Bill Harrah came up to Lake Tahoe,

you'd always see him hanging out at the race book talking to Freddy Vogel, and Bob Ring was always with him. At the time, people said, "Oh, Fred Vogel and Bill Harrah are good friends." I didn't realize at the time that there was a money connection with them earlier in their life.

Were there a lot of players who were interested in the race book?

Not that many. I really couldn't give you an amount on that, either. There was nowhere near the excitement that there is in sports books now. It was practically all horse race betting at that time.

Did they have a bingo game at the lake?

Yes, bingo went in when he first opened the club in 1955. They would play bingo during the day. I think it opened around nine or ten in the morning and would go until five or six at night. In the evening it became the South Shore Room. They would have entertainment in that room in the evenings and bingo during the daytime. When they expanded across the street, they had a good size bingo room in the Stateline Club. How many people could play, I don't know, but probably at least one hundred fifty people could play there.

But it was important to the Harrah's mix?

Yes, because that's how Bill Harrah first started in Reno. He started with bingo games only. That was the one facet of gaming that he was completely familiar with. He had opened his first bingo parlor in Reno in 1937, and it wasn't until 1943, 1944, 1945 that he opened the Blackout Bar. He had a crap table in there, plus a twenty-one game and a few slots, but he didn't really go into a full-blown casino until 1946. So you could say the first eight or nine years that he was in Reno, all he really had was bingo games. So he probably not only had an attachment to them, it probably gave him a feeling of confidence. He knew he had an almost guaranteed source of revenue coming from those bingo games.

There might have been a little emotional attachment there as far as, “Hey! That’s what I’ve started with, and that’s what I’m going to go with for a long time.”

From your perception, what role did advertising play in the success of Harrah’s?

Advertising was another one of the key ingredients in the success of Harrah’s. We talked earlier about the bus programs and the entertainment being two of the key factors in Harrah’s success, but if you don’t advertise your bus program, and if you don’t advertise your entertainment, then they aren’t going to be able to make the club a success. The more you think about Harrah’s, the more you realize how important the advertising was or still is. An interesting fact—and I don’t know exactly what year this started—a gentleman named Mark Curtis, who wound up being vice president of public relations and advertising, worked under the direction of Holmes Hendricksen, who eventually became vice president of entertainment. It shows you how important the advertising was, that the advertising person was working hand-in-hand with, and actually working under the direction of, the entertainment department.

Do you remember the kind of advertising that Harrah’s did in those years?

A big program that they ran for a long time was called “I Hit the Jackpot at Harrah’s Club.” The “I Hit the Jackpot” advertising theme was used on billboards, and they were used on postcards a lot. Harrah’s Club gave away a lot of free postcards that had cartoon characters in different situations always based around the theme of, “I Hit the Jackpot at Harrah’s Club.” I believe they used a cartoonist named Virgil Partch. His acronym was VIP. They also used a Middle Eastern sultan for their logo, or mascot, for a long time. The sultan was used on postcards and on billboards, and another important place the sultan was used was on the reels of the slot machines. On some machines Harrah’s would replace the jackpot bars with a picture of the sultan, and if

you lined up three sultans, you would win the jackpot. So they used that sultan quite a bit.

The sultan logo was eliminated as a logo and symbol of Harrah's in 1959, because it was limited in design and in theme, and they felt they couldn't expand on it. At the same time, they eliminated the word "club" in advertising and used only the word "Harrah's," and that became their logo pretty much the way it is even now. The interesting thing about that was that Harrah's had capitalized on Harolds Club. Harolds Club, of course, had had a big advertising program starting in the early 1940s featuring the slogan, "Harolds Club or Bust." Bill Harrah once made the remark that he was glad his name was Harrah, because it sounded so much like Harold. So in the early days Harrah's was advertised as Harrah's Club to take advantage of the similarity of Harrah's Club and Harolds Club. After Harrah's became more established and more on their own, they dropped the usage of the word club and became known only as Harrah's, and I thought that was kind of slick on Bill Harrah's part.

What role did golf play in the success of Harrah's?

Golf became a very important part of Harrah's in 1962, when they started what they called the Celebrity Tournament. One of the instigators of the golf tournament was Bob Ring. Bob Ring loved golf, but, to the best of my knowledge, Bill Harrah never played any golf. A lot of different people take credit for the idea of a golf tournament, and in reality it was probably a decision that came out of a committee. They invited entertainers and sports stars to play with their good customers. I remember Curly Musso, the general manager, said to me, "We're just as interested in getting crap shooters to play in this golf tournament, as we are in getting golfers to play." In other words, they didn't care how good a golfer this customer was. If he was a good crap player or a good twenty-one player, then he would get invited to the tournament. It was exciting for the good customers to play with these sports celebrities. If you liked football or baseball, and you had a chance to play golf with Dizzy Dean or Joe DiMaggio or Elroy "Crazy Legs" Hirsch from the Los Angeles Rams or Gordon Soltau or Leo

Nomellini from the Forty-Niner's football team, it was a thrill. They would pair the celebrities with the high-rolling gamblers, and, of course, Harrah's picked up the tab. All the players had to do was show up there and play. Harrah's had special shows and special entertainment for the golfers, and just for playing, they were liable to give you a set of golf clubs or a pair of golf shoes. They had several great prizes, and as the program grew and grew, Harrah's gave away more and more things. For a hole-in-one they gave away a Rolls Royce automobile. That's a pretty high-class hole-in-one prize.

They had golf tournaments both in Reno and in Lake Tahoe, and they lasted for several years. I don't know exactly what year they ended, but they finally became cost-prohibitive, because every year Bill Harrah and Bob Ring wanted to do something bigger and better, and more and more people wanted to get invited. It got to where you just couldn't give somebody a set of golf clubs to come and play in the tournament. They started giving them maybe two sets of golf clubs or a golf cart. The prizes and everything eventually became so expensive that they had to drop it, but it certainly did bring a lot of business in when it first started.

I never played golf, so I never played in the tournament, but employees did play. Most of them were in at least middle management or above. Some of the shift managers played. The pit manager might play, and, of course, the general manager and the P.R. people played. They had a special person that was in charge of the golf tournaments only, a gentleman named Alex Stewart. He worked in conjunction with a well-known major league baseball player, Jackie Jensen. Jackie and Alex Stewart were both employed by Harrah's. Stewart worked only as a golf coordinator, but Jackie Jensen was involved in all sorts of public relations and customer relations. When Bill Harrah put his mind to doing something, he, of course, went about it the best possible way. They also had things for the golfers' wives to do. They'd have fashion shows, luncheons, and things like that to keep the wives entertained.

Probably the most important element is the one we've left for last, and that's entertainment. What role did entertainment play?

I'm a firm believer in entertainment, and I believe it was a big thing that Harrah's did when they opened their South Shore Room in December of 1959. They had had entertainment in the smaller Lake Club across the street. They had a small stage bar even at that time, and they had opened the original South Shore Room in 1955 shortly after the club opened. But the seating was limited, and the budget was limited. When they opened the new South Shore Room, they could seat around one thousand people. They opened on December 15 of 1959 with Red Skelton as the headliner. The Winter Olympics started in February of 1960 at Squaw Valley, and the opening of the South Shore Room tied in great with that. Harrah's had entertainment seven days a week, and they changed the entertainers, as a rule, every two weeks. The entertainers would put on two shows a night and usually three shows on Saturday. The dinner show started at eight o'clock. That was the only show where food was served. The cocktail show would start at midnight and get out around 1:30. On Saturday nights they would have a third show, which, I believe, started at two a.m. By changing their shows every two weeks, they gave people a reason to come back to Reno or Tahoe. If you're in Sacramento or Lodi or San Francisco or even in the Northwest, in Portland or Seattle, and you came to Lake Tahoe to see Red Skelton, you knew that someone such as Patti Page, Nat King Cole, or Bill Cosby was going to be appearing in two weeks or less with a whole new show. That gave all those people an idea. They'd say, "Gee, let's come back in two weeks."

Another thing entertainment did was give people an excuse to come to the lake. People in California or in an outlying area would say, "Well, I went to Tahoe, and I went to Harrah's Club."

"Oh, you went up there to gamble?"

"Well, no, I didn't really go up there to gamble. I went up there to see Red Skelton," because oftentimes they didn't want to say

that they gambled, so they would say, "I just went up there to see the entertainment, and I really enjoyed the Red Skelton show. In a couple weeks King Cole is going to be up there, and I've always liked Nat King Cole. I think I'll go up and see him."

Plus, you could always say to your wife, or vice versa, "Let's go up and see the show." You didn't have to say, "I want to go up there and play craps and lose all my money." You could say, "I want to go up there and just see the show." It gave you an excuse and a reason to go. Of course, Bill Harrah's theory—and most people that run a gambling operation, their theory is the same—was if you get somebody in the door, they're going to gamble, and they're going to lose some money. So the key element was to get them up there and in your casino, and entertainment was what Harrah's used to get players there.

Could you talk about some of the specific entertainers?

Well, Red Skelton opened, and he set the pattern. Harrah's always had the top entertainers of the era, whoever was famous or well-known appeared at Harrah's. They seemed to be able to know who was going to be hot and who was coming on the scene. Ed Sullivan had a variety show on TV every Sunday night, and he would feature entertainers and acts, and it seemed like in the next week or two Harrah's would have them there. They had the unique ability, again, to sense who was going to be a big star and who wasn't going to be a big star.

There were a lot of regulars that played there every year. Lawrence Welk played there for many, many years. Other regulars included Nat King Cole, Patti Page, Sammy Davis Jr., and others too numerous to mention. Oftentimes the headliners would bring an opening act with them, and a lot of times the opening acts became famous in their own right. I remember seeing Barbra Streisand appearing there as an opening act for Jack Benny. Bobby Darin was an opening act for George Burns. That was one of the things that made it exciting to work in Harrah's at that time, getting to see so many of the famous entertainers. People that you had heard on the radio or seen on

TV would be playing on the tables in your pit area, and you could visit with and talk to them.

Jack Benny and Mary Livingston were big entertainers at that time, and they would always come up with George Burns and Gracie Allen. The four of them were very good friends in real life. Jack Benny always played a miserly person on his radio and TV programs, and he was always portrayed as a tight and stingy person. I thought it was interesting that when he would play on the dice table—he and George Burns would play dice together for hours sometimes—he always played very small. A big bet for Jack Benny would be five dollars. He'd usually bet two or three dollars. He knew the dice game real well and played it a lot, but he never bet any big money on it. Ironically, his wife, Mary Livingston, would be playing on a twenty-one table, maybe ten yards away, and she would be betting anywhere from one hundred dollars to five hundred dollars a hand. [laughter] She was a very high-limit player and a very demanding player. You couldn't do enough to satisfy Mary Livingston. The dealer was rude, or she had to have Perrier water, or she wanted a new dealer. She was very demanding. Jack Benny was the complete opposite. He never asked for, or never wanted, anything, a complete gentleman.

I remember walking into work one day about four o'clock in the afternoon in the middle of the summertime. It was beautiful outside, and I didn't feel like going to work. As I walked into the pit, a dealer stopped me and said, "Mr. Goodman dropped his tie pin. Could you look for Mr. Goodman's tie pin?"

I thought, "You know, I really don't have time to look for this guy's tie pin, whoever the hell Mr. Goodman is. I got things to do. I got to get the schedule going. I got to get the shift changed," but I said, "Sure, I'll look for Mr. Goodman's tie pin." So I'm crawling around on my hands and knees underneath a roulette table looking for a tie pin, and I find this tie pin down there, and it's actually a tie bar. It's got emeralds and diamonds and rubies on it, a beautiful tie bar. I thought, "Boy, this is really a nice tie bar." So I get off my hands and knees and hand the tie bar to this customer, and it's Benny Goodman, the world-famous clarinet player. [laughter] I thought, "Well, I'm glad I found that tie bar. It's probably worth a couple thousand dollars." [laughter]

One summer Harry James played in the lounge. I don't think he ever played the big room, and I was working the pit on swing shift. One night when the band comes to the end of the song, he looks down in the audience and sees Frank Sinatra sitting in the audience. Of course, Frank Sinatra used to sing for the Harry James's band in the late 1930s. This was before Frank Sinatra had ever appeared at Harrah's. He owned the Cal-Neva Club at Lake Tahoe at that time, and he had come over to watch the Harry James show. Well, Harry James stopped his act, and he talked Frank Sinatra into coming up on the stage and singing a couple of songs. I thought that was really something to see. A guy like Sinatra coming out of the lounge and getting up there cold to sing a couple of songs with his old band leader.

About that same time when Sinatra owned the Cal-Neva, I was going out with a girl named Bonnie who was Harrah's entertainment secretary. We'd never seen Frank Sinatra appear, so we asked Harrah's entertainment director, Bob Vincent, to get us a reservation to see the Sinatra show at the Cal-Neva Lodge. So he made all the arrangements, and we drove over there in an old Chevrolet convertible. When we pulled up in front of the Cal-Neva Lodge, a guy named Skinny D'Amato met us. Skinny D'Amato was very high up in the Frank Sinatra organization, and he was also a well-known underworld character. [laughter] There was a line going from the front door of the Cal-Neva all the way through the casino into the showroom. Well, Skinny D'Amato grabbed us by the arm, pulled us through the casino, pushing and shoving people out of the way, and he brought us right down in front to the perfect table. [laughter] Then he sat us down and said, "Everything's on the house," and he left. That was the last time we ever saw him. It was the perfect show, probably the greatest show I ever saw in my life. Their entire "Rat Pack" appeared that night. Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., Joey Bishop, and Frank Sinatra were all there. It was so extemporaneous and so ad-lib. I know it must have been practiced or rehearsed to an extent, but all those guys appearing up there on stage—it was just fantastic.

When I looked back at it, it made me realize how much clout Harrah's had in the entertainment world, even in 1962. The top man in the Sinatra organization at that time came out just to put

somebody from Harrah's in the show. That showed the importance of Harrah's Club.

Also in 1962 a movie was filmed at Harrah's Tahoe. It was called *Little Miss Marker*, and it starred Tony Curtis and Suzanne Pleshette. There were a lot of good interior shots and exterior shots of Harrah's, and it was a good showcase for Harrah's.

Tony Curtis was gambling a little bit up there, and Harrah's had given him a marker for five thousand dollars, and he was a little late in paying it back. So a memorandum came out from the general manager that said, "The next shift manager that sees Tony Curtis will approach him about paying that five thousand dollar marker back."

It just so happened that I was the shift manager on duty when Tony Curtis came in. So I went up to Tony Curtis, introduced myself, gave him my business card, and said, "I'd like to talk to you in private for a few minutes." He seemed very intimidated and very nervous, and I don't know if he'd heard all these horror stories about Las Vegas where this big casino guy is going to come after him and get his money back, or what, but he seemed very nervous and very tense. I took him into a little side room and said to him that he owed five thousand dollars to Harrah's, and we would appreciate it if he would pay it back as soon as possible.

He said, "Oh, yes. Sure, sure. Wait right here." He went over to his dressing room and came back in about ten minutes, and he gave me the check for five thousand dollars. I couldn't have been any more polite, and he probably thought he was lucky he got off the hook without being pounded or having his fingers busted, I don't know. [laughter]

Do you have some recollections about Nat King Cole?

Nat King Cole was another heavy gambler. It was commonplace for him to bet two hundred dollars on the twenty-one table, and oftentimes five hundred dollars, if he got a run going, but he wasn't a good loser. I respect that. I'm not a good loser, either. I remember one time he had fifteen, and he hit that fifteen with a ten. He had gone broke and lost his five hundred dollars, and he was so disgusted that he stuck the ten that broke

him in his mouth and tore it right in half and threw it away. [laughter] He says, "Give me another hit. I didn't like that one." [laughter] We didn't give him another hit, just took the five hundred dollars and went from there.

Julie London and Patti Page were two entertainers that gambled a lot of money. They bet heavy all the time. Five hundred dollars was commonplace for them. Most of the time they would start out betting two, three hundred, but if they were winning a little bit, or if they were losing a little bit, they would think nothing of betting five hundred dollars.

Do you remember their personalities? What kind of person was Julie London?

Julie London was very intense, very concentrated on the game. She didn't want any small talk or any b.s. When she sat down to play, she sat down to play. Patti Page was the same way. Some of them, like Mary Livingston, would talk a lot of the times. Nat King Cole would talk and joke a lot of the time; Bill Cosby would talk and joke; but Julie London and Patti Page were very serious players.

Another entertainer that appeared at Harrah's a lot and was a very big draw was Harry Belafonte. He used to always come there with Sidney Poitier. Sidney Poitier didn't appear on stage. He was there to keep Belafonte company. Belafonte and Poitier both liked to shoot craps, and one night I was overseeing the game, because Belafonte played fairly heavy. He was betting five-dollar chips, and he got quite a run. He had probably seven or eight hundred dollars in five-dollar chips. They had converted them into bigger chips, but he still had probably around seven or eight hundred dollars in five-dollar chips, and they were all on the rail in front of Belafonte and Poitier. After the dice sevened out, and the hand was over, he was ready to cash out. I always remember, he leaned over the table and said, "Say boy, would you cash these chips out for me?" [laughter]

I thought, if someone would have said "Hey, boy" to him, he would have probably become very upset and irritated. I don't know what his purpose was in saying, "Hey boy, would you cash

me out?" But naturally, I did. That was part of my job. I was a pit boss, and I was a host for Harrah's Club, and therefore a host to Harry Belafonte. It didn't bother or upset me that he addressed me in such a manner. I just thought it was interesting that he asked me that way.

This discussion about entertainment illustrates to me the importance of the entertainment policy. Many of them gambled in the club, and in some way it enhanced the entertainment value to Harrah's customers.

Yes, and if you place yourself in that customer's position, someone from another city that had come to Harrah's for the first time, imagine how exciting it would be for you to go home and tell your neighbor or your friend, "I was there, and I was playing on the same dice table that Harry Belafonte played on," or "I played on the same dice table as Jack Benny," or "I played twenty-one where Mary Livingston was playing." It was exciting for the customers, as well as the employees that worked there. It was like a celebrity sighting. I know for a fact that at that time at Harrah's they did not ask the entertainers to go out and mingle with the crowd or play on any of the tables. It was strictly their own doing. I've heard that in later years some casinos in Vegas and maybe some even in northern Nevada have *asked* the entertainers to go out and mingle with the crowds, but at that time I know it wasn't being done. I know in later years, after I left Harrah's, that they would allow some of the entertainers to deal the games. I know Bill Cosby dealt twenty-one there, and I think Dean Martin dealt twenty-one in different places. They would allow the entertainers to go behind the table, and you imagine how exciting it would be if you were a customer, and you had Bill Cosby dealing to you at a twenty-one table.

We haven't talked yet about Harrah's competition. Who were the competitors? What were they like? What kind of businesses did they have? How was Harrah's different?

In 1957 when I went there, next door to Harrah's Club there was the Wagon Wheel, which is now called Harvey's. Across the street there was Sahati's Country Club, a club called the Main Entrance, and a place called the Nevada Club. Every place up there except the Wagon Wheel and Harrah's closed either on Labor Day or shortly after Labor Day. Further on down the road there was a place originally called the Tahoe Village and later called Oliver's Club. In other years there was a smaller place opened called the Tahoe Plaza, which later became the Tahoe Palace, and there was a place called the Glass Crutch.

How far away were they then from Harrah's?

The Plaza was just a few hundred yards away, but Oliver's and Tahoe Village were probably three-quarters of a mile away. They weren't really within walking distance. They were open only in the summertime from Memorial Day to Labor Day. So during the wintertime the only place other than Harrah's that was open was the Wagon Wheel.

Bill Harrah had a history of buying out the competition. Going back as far as the 1930s when the Heart Tango Club was giving him too much competition in his bingo operation, he bought out the Heart Tango game. He started doing the same thing at Lake Tahoe. He bought out the competition across the street: he bought out the Main Entrance; he bought out the Nevada Club; and he bought out Sahati's Country Club—and incorporated all those clubs into what was first known as Harrah's Stateline Country Club, eventually became known as Harrah's Club, and now is Harrah's Tahoe Hotel Casino. So in the wintertime, from 1955 until the early 1960s, the only real competition in the wintertime was the Wagon Wheel.

What was the Wagon Wheel like?

The Wagon Wheel was a rustic type of place. It was dim and dark in there with just a few lights over the gaming tables. They had good stage bar entertainment at that time. Wayne Newton was there in 1959 or 1960, and Gaylord and Holiday, a group that became big in Harrah's, appeared at the Wagon Wheel.

They also had the biggest security guards you ever want to see in your life. If you weren't six-foot five, don't bother to apply for a job in security. They liked them big! You had to be careful you didn't get too drunk when you went into Harvey's, because they wouldn't hesitate to bang people on the head and throw them out the door, which was the complete opposite of Harrah's Club. When Harrah's did have to put someone out, they always tried to put them out peacefully and calmly, which, again, was a contradiction to the way most gambling casinos were operated in those days. Even Harolds Club was a little tough when it came to putting people out, but Harrah's people, from the time I was there in 1957, and possibly before that, were always careful how they put people out.

The Wagon Wheel had great food. They had a room called the Sage Room located in the rear of their building. They were famous for good food then and, of course, still are famous for their good food. Harrah's has now surpassed them, but at that time the best food at the lake was at Harvey's Wagon Wheel.

What made Harvey's was Bill Harrah. The Wagon Wheel actually became an overflow joint for Harrah's. People would come up on the buses, and they would naturally wander into the Wagon Wheel. They spent most of their time in Harrah's, but any time you travel that far on a bus, if you have any kind of curiosity at all, you're going to want to walk around into the other places, and because Harrah's stayed open, it enabled the Wagon Wheel to stay open. Previously, the Wagon Wheel had stayed open on a real bare bones basis. They had a gas pump out in front, and they had a bar and a little coffee shop that stayed open, but they didn't really have much gambling year-round until Bill Harrah came to Lake Tahoe in 1955.

When I first went to the lake in 1957, the Wagon Wheel had two or three crap tables and probably about ten twenty-one tables. They had mostly older, experienced dealers, and a lot of them had come from Reno. It was a well-run operation. They had more restaurants than Harrah's. They put more emphasis on food than Harrah's, but not as much on entertainment. Their pit was just a little bit smaller than Harrah's the first three years, but when Harrah's expanded across the street into the Stateline Country Club, Harrah's became much larger than the Wagon

Wheel. The Wagon Wheel did not expand nearly as rapidly as Harrah's did, and they never had the entertainment that Harrah's did. All they ever had was stage bar entertainment, good stage bar entertainment, but no big show room.

Did they do their own busing?

They did for a time. I can't remember the exact time frame that they did, but they did have their own buses for a certain period of time. They didn't start it until way after Harrah's started their bus program, but they did have their own, and then it was a battle. People from the Wagon Wheel would come over and see how many of their bus people were in Harrah's, and Harrah's would send people over there to see how many bus people there were in the Wagon Wheel. [laughter] They actually both helped each other, because if somebody from Harvey's went into Harrah's or vice versa, it was still helping both of them.

What about advertising?

Harvey's had a billboard system that was used mainly on Highway 50 on the California side through Placerville and Pollock Pines and into Sacramento. On the billboards they stressed the motto, "Fun, Food, and Fortune." That was their motto. All the dealers wore it on their blouses. They had three little circles on their blouses that said, "Fun, Food, and Fortune."

To go back to Harrah's, when and why did they start dealers schools?

There were two reasons they started dealers schools. First, when they first took over the Stateline Club, there was such a tremendous demand for dealers that it was almost impossible to fill the ranks of employees with experienced dealers. Secondly, they had been hurt a lot by people that were stealing from them and cheating them in one way or another. So to fill the demand for dealers and to cut down on the stealing, they came up with the idea of starting a dealers school. The schools grew and expanded

as the years went by. The first schools were filled with employees from other departments, such as in the food department. People would be hired to work in the snack bar or as busboys, or they would be hired in the parking lot, or as change people in the slot department. When dealers were needed, notices would be put up on the bulletin board telling when schools would be starting and asking you to apply if you wanted to go to school. Most people did want to improve themselves and get out of the department they were in, because dealers made more money than those other jobs did, plus the tips in those days weren't that big, but they were better than they were making in their other jobs. In the early days they would have to take a mathematical test or a reading test to see if they had enough skills to get into the dealers school. As years went along, it got to be where, if just about anybody applied, they would be accepted into dealers school. Most of them all made it through dealers school. There were a few that washed out and didn't qualify, but not many. We would start the schools in early spring, because business would pick up in May. As we got into June and July, we needed a lot of dealers in a hurry. Then we would expand the size of the school and also cut down the amount of time that they were in school. We were turning out twenty-one dealers after a week of school, sometimes. When they first started out, the schools would be as long as three weeks for a crap dealer and two weeks for a twenty-one dealer. There were a lot of weak dealers that came out of there, but volume overcomes a lot of mistakes. If the dealers made a mistake, the players kept on playing, and so the money eventually all came back to the club. I remember watching a crap game one time where the player put a dollar on eleven, which, of course, pays fifteen-to-one. Well, the break-in dealer reached in the rack, and he grabbed five-dollar chips instead of dollars. Wasn't even aware of what he was doing. He cut out fifteen five-dollar chips, which is seventy-five dollars, when the payoff should have been fifteen dollars. So I stopped him from paying and put the money back in the rack. I said, "It pays fifteen-to-one."

He said, "Yes, I know that." He says, "I give him fifteen of these chips." [laughter]

I said, "Well, the problem is you should have given him dollar chips instead of the five-dollar chips."

When we first started using break-in dealers, we would schedule a crap table so that there would be one break-in dealer to work with the three other dealers, so that there was always an experienced dealer with the break-in dealers. Then, as we got more and more break-ins, we tried to get it to where there were two break-ins and two regulars, and then we got where we'd have three break-ins, and we'd try and put one experienced dealer with that group of three. Finally, probably about 1962, when we were just really growing and expanding so fast, we said, "Oh, the hell with it. Just find four dealers whether they're break-ins or not." [laughter] That was the level that we reached. We were going with practically all break-in dealers, because as we expanded, we not only needed more dealers, we needed more box men, and we needed more pit bosses, and, of course, we were promoting experienced dealers to supervisory positions. It was an exciting time, because you felt you were really part of something, and it was exciting to go from a dealer to a box man to a pit boss.

Another problem we had was that the Wagon Wheel was using Harrah's as an employment source. I don't remember the exact price that we paid the dealers, but I think we started them out at sixteen dollars a day after they got out of school. Then, there were thirty-day evaluations where they would go up another dollar a day in wages. At the time we were having this huge amount of kids coming out of dealers school, the Wagon Wheel wasn't running a dealers school at all. They would send one or two of their pit bosses to Harrah's to check out our dealers, and when they would see a good one, they would catch them after work or on a break and offer them a dollar or two dollars or even three dollars a day more to come across the street and work at the Wagon Wheel. Of course, when you're making sixteen dollars a day, and somebody offers you two or three dollars a day more, that's a pretty good percentage of increase, so we lost a lot of our dealers to the Wagon Wheel in that way, and, as I say, Harvey's didn't even bother to run a dealers school for many, many years, but as their expansion got bigger, they eventually had to operate dealers schools, also.

Harrah's not only expanded, but made a cultural change at the same time, without anybody really knowing what they were

doing. All the other casinos in the state were hiring experienced dealers or semi-experienced dealers, and a lot of old crossroaders. Harrah's, in a very short period of time, went to a whole new culture of people who had never been exposed to any of that. All they knew was the Harrah's way.

The first female pit supervisor at Lake Tahoe was in either 1962 or 1963. We promoted two ladies to pit supervisors. One of them was Dolores Codega, and the other was Dorothy Blevins. At about the same time, in Harrah's Reno they promoted three ladies to the floor. One of them was Bessie Peterson, another was Dorothy Stump, and I don't remember the third one's name.

Because the vast majority of promotions were to crap dealers, we maintained a good strong crew of female twenty-one dealers. The crap dealers were promoted, oftentimes, after a year or two of dealing—they were “instant supervisors.” Of course, most of them had very little, if any, knowledge of twenty-one or roulette. Most of them had never even dealt either one of those games at all, and that created a certain amount of hard feelings amongst the twenty-one dealers. It would upset them that some kid off the crap table would be supervising their twenty-one game, but, there again, at Harrah's, if you knew all the rules and all the pit policies and procedures on a twenty-one game, all you had to know was how to count to twenty-one and to see that that twenty-one dealer was following procedures. If they were following the procedures, then the game was being dealt properly, and it was very difficult to be cheated.

Later on, Harrah's started having schools for other departments. They had schools for waitresses. They had schools for keno writers. They had schools for just about *every* department. The new type of employee proved to be successful for both Harrah's and the individual. One example—out of many—is Russ McLennan. Russ went to work at Harrah's in the slot department. You might say he grew up in Harrah's Club. Russ was exposed to Harrah's Club policy and procedure and did everything and learned everything the way that Harrah's wanted it learned, and he went up the ladder. He was a dealer and a box man and a pit boss and a shift manager—and casino manager. Right now he's the second or third longest employee at Harrah's Lake Tahoe. He is the vice president of special promotions for

Harrah's Club. So he is a good example of a current Harrah's Club employee that went from the very bottom to the very top. Of course, there were other examples of the same kind, such as Holmes Hendricksen starting out as a busboy and winding up as vice president of entertainment. Lloyd Dyer started out as a cashier and wound up as president of the organization. Maurice Sheppard started out as a bookkeeper and wound up as president.

Harrah's is virtually the only casino that you can think of where people had such clear career paths, where they came in as young college students and worked their way through the organization up to top level management and stayed there thirty years. It's hard to say who spotted these people. Bill Harrah spotted some of these people, but not all of them. Was it Rome Andreotti? Was it some of the top shift managers? Was it the club managers, such as Curly Musso or Mert Smith? Somebody spotted the potential in these people and allowed them to expand to their full potential. Someone spotted these people and said, "Gee, this guy is going to be a good pit boss or a good pit supervisor or shift manager, but he's not going to go any higher. He's not going to move up into another field."

I was thinking the other day about general managers at Harrah's Tahoe and Harrah's Reno, and out of all the general managers there have been in those two clubs, the only one that came out of keno was a fellow named George Gilgert. The general managers of the clubs in the early days came out of the pit. Curly Musso was a pit person. Al Fontana was a pit person. Mert Smith was a pit person. You want to go back before that, Wayne Martin was a pit person. They were all general managers of Harrah's. So for a time in the early days of gambling the general managers came out of the pit, and as the years went by, the general managers came out of other departments. They came out of administration or the cashier's office. There were several general managers of Lake Tahoe that came out of the cashier's office. So it seems as if someone had the ability to recognize that this person had potential and that person didn't have potential. Bill Harrah changed it so that the pit people weren't necessarily the ones that were running the casinos. It's become even more prevalent in the last few years. There are very few general managers today that

were former crap dealers or pit bosses. Harrah's organization had a lot to do with the changing of that. We were talking the other day and mentioned that I was one of the last general managers that was a crap dealer, and I think we established that Billy McHugh at the Cal-Neva is possibly the only general manager left that is a former crap dealer.

How large and how important was keno when you were there?

Keno was not that highly thought of in those days. How large the department was, I don't recall, but I know it was stuck way over in the side, in the corner at the far end of the building. There was little or no advertising to make keno a big game. It was something that was there. I don't have any idea what percentage of revenue came from keno. I don't recall romancing any keno customers.

Did the pit supervisors go to keno to check the big keno tickets?

As I recall, you had to check any payoffs over a thousand or eleven hundred dollars. It was always kind of strange, because the pit person going over to check the keno ticket knew very little about keno. It was more to ensure the fact that the payoff was a thousand or two thousand or whatever, that the money was transported over there and given to a keno supervisor, and that the keno supervisor paid out the money. But for years pit people have gone to the keno counter to check the balls and check the rabbit ears or check the keno film, and they really didn't know what they were looking for.

We talked a lot about who were the key players in Harrah's. Could you go through the organizational structure when you were there and tell us what Bill's title was? What everybody's title was?

I don't remember what the exact titles were at that time. They did, of course, change. About that time is when a lot of those title changes came into effect. All I recall is that you knew Bill Harrah

was the boss, and you knew that Bob Ring was right under him and was his right-hand man. Also, about that time you knew that Rome Andreotti became very dominant. I remember when I went to work there in 1957, Rome Andreotti was working in the pit, and six years later when I left, he was probably the most important man in the organization. I don't know what his title was, but he was overseeing all the gambling: the pit, the keno, and the slots. Below Bill, Bob, and Rome there was a club manager at each location. When I first went to work there in 1957, a gentleman named Eldon Campbell was general manager. He was the first general manager. His assistant was a fellow named Bill Goupil. Bill Goupil had come from southern California to work with Bill Harrah. The second general manager was a gentleman named Pat France (originally Francellini). He was promoted out of the cashier's cage. He had gone to work for Harrah's probably about 1947 or 1948 as a cashier and wound up becoming general manager of Harrah's, and then he eventually became vice president of entertainment of Harrah's Club before leaving to go to the Tahoe Sahara. He worked for Tahoe Sahara as the entertainment director. The third general manager, the general manager that was there when I left, was a fellow named Curly Musso. I may have mentioned earlier that Curly was one of the owners of George's Gateway Club. George Cannon and Curly Musso opened George's Gateway and later sold it to Bill Harrah.

Do you think he was promoted because they had a contractual obligation to give him a job, or because they really thought he was doing a good job?

In those days a good general manager was supposed to be a good gaming person, and Curly was a very knowledgeable gaming person. Been in the gaming business, both legally and illegally, for many years, and he had a lot of talent with people and a lot of talent with any kind of casino gaming, craps, roulette, twenty-one. He was very skillful in all the games himself, and that's what owners were looking for in those days. So I would say they thought he would do a good job.

Do you know why Eldon Campbell left? Why Pat France left?

Eldon Campbell got fired, but, ironically, he walked right across the street, and Harvey Gross hired him as general manager of the Wagon Wheel. He worked as general manager of the Wagon Wheel for many, many years, probably for ten or twelve years.

Do you have any idea why he was fired from Harrah's?

Just strictly rumor. I heard that he drank too much, and Bill Harrah decided to get rid of him.

And Pat France?

With Pat France it was a promotion. They were having trouble with the entertainment department. They'd gone through two or three entertainment directors, so they pumped Pat up to entertainment director for awhile. That's why they moved him out; it was kind of a lateral promotion.

I think Bill Harrah, once again, was the innovator, or the first casino person to really put forth the theory that if you were a manager, you could manage any department. You didn't have to be a knowledgeable pit person to be a pit manager, or you didn't have to be a knowledgeable entertainment person to be an entertainment manager. I've heard that other people had believed in that theory, but Bill Harrah pushed it to the limit. The prime example that I remember happened in Harrah's Reno. There was a fellow named Jim Calhoun who was the head of the cleaning department or the maintenance department or the engineering department, one or the other. They saw leadership ability in Mr. Calhoun, and they promoted him to a shift manager in the club.

Curly retired from Harrah's as a general manager, but a very short time later he came back to Harrah's and went to work as a casino host. Curly was a very likeable, very loquacious, and very popular kind of a person, and customers loved him.

How long did he last as general manager?

Oh, I would say probably five to seven years. I don't think he was removed. I think he decided to back off and slow down. That was a tough job. Seven days, ten, twelve hours a day was not uncommon for general managers, and several other positions, too, of course. Harrah's demanded a lot of you, and if you were a hardworking person, you demanded a lot of yourself. If you were in a job such as that, you just had to put in that amount of time. I think Curly was at the time of his life, age-wise, and the time of his life, financially, that he didn't have to work that way. I give him a lot of credit for it. Some of these guys worked until they dropped dead. Look at how young Rome was when he died, he was only in his late fifties. In Bill Harrah's oral history he said, "Rome Andreotti would walk through a wall if I asked him to." That's how much devotion Rome had.

And did he, in some way, ask people to walk through walls?

Yes. The job came first to the detriment of some people's health and to the detriment of some people's marriages. A lot of people wound up getting divorces, and there were a couple of shift managers that died young. As I said, Rome died pretty young. So that's why I think Curly just felt—and not in a derogatory manner—"I don't need this anymore. I don't need it for my ego, and I don't need it for my bank account." Curly liked to play golf and have a good time, and I think he just backed off to enjoy life to its fullest.

It appears to me that all the strategic thinking, all the conceptual planning was done at this vague Bill Harrah/Bob Ring/Rome Andreotti level that we don't seem to be able to get to and understand how it happened, but it happened, and the club manager's job was to implement it and to monitor it and keep it going?

Yes. I think a lot of it was almost through osmosis. The people around Bill Harrah—whether they were Mr. Sheppard, or in later years, Lloyd Dyer, or for many years Rome—sensed what Bill Harrah wanted. Bill Harrah did not tell you how to do things. He

just told you he wanted something done, and it was up to you to see that it got done. You didn't ask Bill Harrah, "How do you want that done?" For example, he might say, "I want the best entertainment." He didn't say, "I want Lawrence Welk, and I want Harry James," or "I want Patti Page." He would just expect the entertainment director to get it done. So a lot of the things that happened, I think, happened because of the particular people who were surrounding him at that time. Once it came down from there, it came to the general manager, or the department manager in some cases. He just brought it right on down to the next level, and then the management person there brought it down to the next level, and so on down.

Directly underneath the general manager, there was an assistant general manager. Pat France's assistant was a man named Bob Kralicek. Bob Kralicek was the assistant to Pat and to Curly Musso, also. He was a financial person. He was an accountant and more of an administrator. Ken Clever was also Curly's assistant, as was Holmes Hendricksen, and Holmes took over from Curly. When Holmes became general manager, his assistant was a fellow named George Gilgert, who we talked about earlier. George came out of keno, and when Holmes was promoted to vice president of entertainment, then George Gilgert became the general manager.

So being an assistant was also a training ground for a replacement?

Yes.

So when they got ready to move that general manager, they had somebody ready. I'm told that that was an explicit policy at Harrah's—everybody was training somebody to replace them so that they could be promoted.

That's correct, but it didn't always work, because Bill Goupil did not take Eldon's place, and Kralicek did not take Pat's place. It was a training ground, and if you didn't work out, then you didn't work out. I went from assistant to a full-time pit manager.

So, you're right. Harrah's was always training someone to take someone else's place.

What was the role of the general manager and assistant?

Well, that's a tough one for me to answer. As a pit manager I reported directly to the general manager, and the keno manager and the slot manager did, too. They were, of course, in direct contact with Reno. Reno was always the main place. Everything came from Reno. It was like Reno was heaven or God, and whatever they put out, it came to the general manager, and what he knew or didn't know, we weren't really kept that much informed of. The general manager told you what he wanted you to know. The only contact I had with him was as far as pit business. You'd hear about it if your wage ratio was too high or if a player had won or lost a lot of money—things like that—but it wasn't like I reported to him every day.

There were department manager meetings that were conducted by the general manager, and he would talk about different things, possibly advertising programs they were going to do, or different entertainers that would be coming along. As I mentioned earlier, like when Tony Curtis had a marker they wanted paid, the general manager would handle things like that.

How often did you have manager's meetings?

I don't recall having department manager meetings on a regular basis. If we did, it was maybe once a month or so, but I don't remember having an awful lot of them. The management meetings that so many people talk about were on a higher level.

Who were the other department managers?

Well, the keno manager was a fellow named Jake Sigwart. Jake was the first keno manager at Lake Tahoe. The first slot manager I remember is Max Lewis. Max eventually became an assistant general manager. The cashier manager—cage manager—was Holmes Hendricksen. For most of the time I was there, Holmes

was cage and credit manager. When I first went to work at Harrah's, Pat France was cashier and credit manager.

Was there somebody from the restaurant and the bar?

The bar manager was Freddy Specchio. The food managers seemed to come and go all the time. I can't remember specifically any food managers.

Would there be somebody there from the maintenance department?

Yes, the maintenance person was Austin Raymer.

What about parking?

There was a parking lot manager. His name was Gene Beck, and I don't remember if he went to the meetings or not.

Do you have any idea how many parking spaces they had?

No, I have no idea. No idea. It was big, but big is relative. How big is big? I couldn't even hazard a guess. They had valet and non-valet parking. There was no parking garage. It was all surface parking.

When Bill Harrah bought some of those other casinos, did he tear them down and make parking lots out of them?

No. He did buy adjoining property, the property with trees on it, but with no buildings on it, and turned those properties into parking lots. Another thing he did was keep an awful lot of those trees. He didn't cut all those trees down. He was environmentally conscious, even at that time. He didn't cut all the trees down and blacktop the entire area. If you go up there, even to this day, you'll see a tremendous amount of trees scattered around in the parking lots.

Back to your manager's meetings. Can you picture one and describe what might have happened?

I don't remember a lot of specifics of the meetings. I do remember that the general manager, either Pat France or Curly Musso, would conduct the meetings. They weren't very long meetings, and there wasn't a lot of free-flow interchange or exchange of ideas. The GM got up there and said what he had to say, did not ask for a lot of comments or observations. The one thing that I remember learning from the meetings was, in later years when I held meetings myself, how important it is to get an exchange from the people attending the meeting. I talked to so many people that when they'd come out of a meeting they'd say, "Boy, that was really a good meeting." The reason they thought it was a good meeting is because they had talked themselves, and they had put up a few of their ideas. So I never had a meeting in my life that I didn't encourage everyone to talk, and if they didn't talk, I would force them to talk by asking them questions and getting them to participate.

All I can say about the meetings is that I don't remember any specific rules or orders or instructions that we were given. They were conducted by the general manager, and he said what he had to say, he did not encourage comments, and when it was over, we were out of there.

Did you get a lot of memos, directives from the general manager?

Not that many, no. When I was pit manager, Curly was general manager, and if he had something he wanted to tell you, he would tell you in person. I don't remember as a pit manager sending out very many memos. I think the memo idea evolved in later years.

I think today there's too much paperwork. What is happening now is that there is a lot of e-mail being sent to people in different departments, and you're losing a lot of one-on-one contact. I think memos are good to a degree, but you can overdo them.

Do you think one of the keys to Harrah's success was they just said, "We expect you to do this," and they talked about results, rather than the way of doing it?

I think so, yes. They looked at results, and it's hard to explain what was expected. It's like an example that Holmes Hendricksen talked about. You knew they were going to open either the Lake Club or the Stateline Country Club on the weekends. You *knew* they were going to open it. They didn't come and tell you, "Get on the telephone and call all these people and get them to come in." They, whoever "they" is, just knew or expected that, if you needed more tables open, you would start calling dealers. If you needed some more keno writers, you would start calling keno writers. It was expected of you. It was expected that you knew to do this. If you were a department manager, you had to get that club open, and you had to get somebody behind those tables to get them operating. I don't recall anybody ever having to come along and say, "Gee, Dwayne, call somebody and get somebody in here." You just started doing it. You knew it had to be done, so you did it.

The same way with dealers or floor men, when it came to overtime, because that's mainly how we ran those clubs on the weekends during the wintertime, when we opened them. It was practically all overtime. Sometimes we would schedule people from six in the morning until six at night, and schedule another group from six at night until six in the morning. So you were scheduled for a twelve-hour shift, but oftentimes, when it was busy, you'd go by a dealer, and you wouldn't say, "Can you work overtime tonight?" You would just say, "We need you to work. We aren't going to be able to close this table, and you're going to have to stay here until we can get you off."

Very, very, very rarely do I ever remember anyone saying, "Oh, geez, I can't work." They knew that they were expected to work.

Do you recall any people that worked at Harrah's during your time there that either were important then or went on to be important to the growth and development of Harrah's?

The two most important people that worked at Lake Tahoe when I was there were Lloyd Dyer and Holmes Hendricksen. Lloyd started there in 1957 as a cashier, and Holmes had started there in the summer of 1956 as a busboy.

Rome was there too, wasn't he?

Rome had started in Reno in 1948. He came over from the Frontier Club, and he transferred to Lake Tahoe in 1955. Rome went up there as a pit boss and then very shortly afterwards became the swing shift manager at Harrah's Lake Tahoe. He returned to Reno in about 1958 or 1959. His career from then on was phenomenal.

When Lloyd and Holmes were working at the lake, they were both visionaries enough to realize that there was a tremendous promotion potential at Harrah's. They were quick to grasp the fact that it was going to be expanding rapidly. Lloyd familiarized himself with all aspects of the operation, and he also became knowledgeable about gaming. Holmes followed the same route. They both came up through the cashier's cage, and, of course, the cashier's cage, to me, is the focal point of any casino. Everything that happens—any kind of a transaction—has to go through the cashier's cage, whether it's somebody cashing a check or getting credit or a player cashing out. No casino can operate without a good cashier's cage and a good credit cage.

Lloyd and Holmes were two big factors in the success of Harrah's. Lloyd, early on in his career, became an assistant to Maurice Sheppard, who was president at that time, and he was instrumental in just about every real estate transaction that took place. At Harrah's, with their rapid growth downtown, he was instrumental in the purchasing of the Golden Hotel and most of the property purchased on Center Street. He was also instrumental in taking Harrah's public in 1971. Lloyd had a degree in finance from the University of Utah.

Why did talented people with college degrees go to work in the cashier's cage at Harrah's?

When Holmes was a junior in college he needed a job in the summertime to earn spending money, like most college kids. In a lot of cases, college students worked to earn money for tuition, board, and room. A college friend of Holmes was working at Harrah's Tahoe, and his dad was a gentleman named Hal White.

Hal was a shift manager, and he got Holmes a summer job. He started out as a busboy and wound up going into the cashier's cage. So what started out to be a summer job became a lifelong career. Lloyd and Holmes went to college together, and that's where they first met. The next year when Lloyd needed some money to continue his education, Holmes says, "Well, come on up to Tahoe, and I'll get you a job up there." So Lloyd went up there to work that summer to earn enough money to continue his education, and that's how they got started in the cashier's cage, and they had a life that is seldom matched by the average college graduate.



I would like to ask you about the Harrah-scope. Just what was the Harrah-scope?

The *Harrah-scope* was a house organ that was published by the Harrah's organization. The first issue came out in April of 1955. They had an employee contest to select a name for the paper, and a lady named Rosemary Primm, who had just been hired as a Harrah's Club employee a few months previously, came up with the name *Harrah-scope*. As I said, the first issue was April of 1955, and the timing was interesting, because it was just a few months prior to Harrah's opening their club at Lake Tahoe. The *Harrah-scope* was originally published every two months, but in a short time they started publishing it monthly. It was a newspaper, or house organ, that printed a lot of information about what was happening, not only in the club itself, but what was happening to the individuals that were working for the club. It was a good morale booster. Almost everyone got their name in it at one time or another. If you were even, say, going on a vacation, and you were going down to Modesto to visit your brother, they would put your name in the paper, and if you bought a new house, they would have your name in the *Harrah-scope*.

I was specifically mentioned several times, as were many other people, and promotions were a big thing, too. If someone would go from a change person to a key man, it would be listed. If you were going to dealers school, it would be listed. If you had gone from a check racker to a roulette dealer, your name was

mentioned. They had lengthy columns of all the promotions that had happened since the last issue had come out. If you had taken two or three months off and gone to Mexico, you were mentioned. If you'd broken your leg while you were skiing, it would be mentioned in the newspaper. Marriages were listed. Births were listed. Another thing that was listed was the entertainment, the entertainers that were currently appearing at Harrah's Reno and Harrah's Tahoe and the entertainers that were coming in the future.

They were also involved with editorials. They would talk about community issues such as Community Chest when they were asking for donations from Harrah's Club employees. Actually, Harrah's Club always has had a great reputation for donating to the Community Chest and the United Fund. Harrah's always had 100 percent participation. It was called a voluntary donation, but it was pretty much cut-and-dried how much you were going to donate. It was spelled out that if you had worked there six months that you donated a day's pay, and it was deducted from your paycheck.

Did you resent that? Were you proud of that contribution?

Well, I didn't resent it, but I wasn't proud of it. Some people weren't too happy with it at all. Some people were very upset about it. I looked at it like it was just part of your job. It was one of those things where you weren't going to win. If you rebelled against it, you probably would have wound up not working there, eventually.

There were a lot of editorials about customer relations and how to take care of your job. I think it was part of the Harrah's Club indoctrination. It was almost like they were placing subliminal thoughts in your mind. You didn't read it and say, "Oh gee, I really got to go out and work on being friendly," but I think it was subliminally put into your mind that it was part of your job to be friendly and get along with the customers.

The *Harrah-scope* was, of course, one way of letting the employees know what was going on and what was happening. They also utilized the bulletin boards, and there were certain

memos that were put out in the pit stand or in the gaming areas of different departments. There was a lot of social activity reported in the *Harrah-scope*. Things such as parties, picnics, barbecues, and get-togethers, and things of that nature would be covered. The club didn't sponsor or encourage people getting together, but they encouraged the *Harrah-scope* reporters to go to those get-togethers. The two early reporters that I recall at Lake Tahoe were Frankie Giordano, who was a dealer at the time and then in later years a pit boss and a pit shift supervisor, and Jimmy Townsend whose career ran almost parallel to Frankie's. He was a crap dealer at the time and later became a box man, pit boss, and shift manager. Both of them worked at Harrah's for many, many years. I don't know if or how much they got paid for it. There were several functions that were covered, and one of them involved Sharkey Begovich. He had a ranch in Plymouth, California, and yearly he would have a round-up and a barbecue and a get-together there. A group of people would go there and help him with the cattle round-up and the branding. They would send a photographer and a reporter to cover those round-ups. It would be the same way if the graveyard shift was having a picnic or a barbecue on the beach after work; the *Harrah-scope* reporter would show up to cover it.

Employee parties were another big thing at Harrah's. It was something that you really looked forward to. During the winter months there was a two or three-month time frame when an employee could select a show, either in Reno's Headliner Room or in the South Shore Room, and you could bring one guest with you. The Reno people came to Tahoe in chartered Greyhound buses, and they would bring several busloads up for an evening. The employees would almost take over the showroom. They were given a party prior to the show with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. They were also given a tour of the building and all the facilities. Then they would go into the South Shore Room for the show and dinner. After the show they had about an hour, an hour and a half, to go to the lounge or gamble or do whatever they wanted to do, and then the buses would take them back to Reno again. It was a great situation. You couldn't have asked for any more, and everything was on the house. It didn't cost you a nickel. I don't

think you were even allowed to leave a tip. The management took care of all of that.

Do you remember personally going to any of them?

I don't personally remember going to any show, but during a lot of that time I was a shift manager, and as a shift manager you were one of the main hosts of the party. You attended the cocktail party, you went along with them on the tours, you mingled with the employees and spent a lot of time with them. It was part of your job to attend that function. So I remember them a lot, because I went to one almost every night while I was working. [laughter]

Another section of the paper was called "Get to Know Your Managers." It would highlight, possibly, department managers or shift managers and, of course, top management. They even had them on Bill Harrah, Bob Ring, and Maurice Sheppard. They would give you a background of their life prior to Harrah's and their life and their job functions at Harrah's, so you became familiar with all the top executives at Harrah's Club. Also, the average employee was given coverage. I had an article written on me one time, because I had played professional baseball earlier in my life, so they did a little article on me about "Dwayne Kling, Harrah's Employee, Formerly Professional Baseball Player." They would have articles on someone that perhaps had been a professional bowler or a basketball player in a different time of their life, or people that were involved in community affairs. They liked to highlight people's lives and show that they had a life *other* than just a crap dealer or a change person or a cashier. They wanted to let people know that there were two sides to a Harrah's employee. The *Harrah-scope* was mailed directly to your home, or if you didn't want one sent to your home, you could pick it up in the club.

They also had articles on what the club was doing, the growth when they were building the restaurant or when they were preparing the showroom or later on when they built the hotel. They had a lot of pictures of the construction that Harrah's Club was going through at any given time, and, of course, they covered

both the Reno expansion and construction as well as the Lake Tahoe expansion and construction. So you were kept up to date, whether you were working in Reno or in Tahoe, so you knew what was going on in the sister facility. As I mentioned earlier, the big thing they stressed was people's promotions and people in the late 1950s, early 1960s, that were attending dealers schools. In later years after they went public, the *Harrah-scope* published all the financial information, earnings, and dividends, and things of that nature.

Do you remember how you felt about Harrah-scope when you worked there?

I looked forward to seeing it when it came out. Of course, the first thing you do is look and see if your name is in it, or whose name is in it that you know, and, of course, you always knew somebody that was in it. I thought it was a good thing for employees' morale and building up their ego and keeping them informed. I do think the first thing you looked for was names that you knew. I think you read about the management policy or ideas later on, if at all. The *Harrah-scope* was looked forward to by most people, and it was talked about by most people. When it came out, everybody knew it was out.

Do you think it was a benefit to working at Harrah's?

I think it was a benefit to both sides. It was definitely a benefit to management, because it was a good way of getting their thoughts and ideas and philosophies across without actually ramming it down someone's throat. It was a subtle way of letting all the employees know management's philosophies and ideas. Perhaps, sometimes it might have been too subtle. It might have gone over a lot of people's heads, but it was one of those things that was always out there in front of you, so it was good for the house in that way, and it was good for the employee, because recognition, to me, is one of the most important things in anybody's life. Whether it's your job or your personal life, you like to be recognized, and the *Harrah-scope* was an ideal way of

recognizing good employees, recognizing all employees, but especially recognizing good employees.

The *Harrah-scope* also was a place where rumors could be put to rest, or if they were true, they could be expanded. Someone might say, "Oh, we're going to buy the Wagon Wheel."

And if Harrah's didn't buy the Wagon Wheel, the *Harrah-scope* would say, "Well, we aren't going to buy the Wagon Wheel. We're going to buy Sahati's Country Club," or "We're going to buy Nevada Club across the street," or "We're going to buy Barney's Club." So you were kept informed of what was going on.

Harrah's clearly was beginning to set a new standard for the whole industry at that time. Were you aware of that as a person? Did you sense that this was really a unique and special thing that was taking place here?

No, I really didn't. I knew that Harrah's was continually improving. I always felt about Harrah's like I did about Disneyland or the New York Yankees. I felt that they were the best. They were a good place to work. Disneyland is famous for being clean. Harrah's is famous for being clean. The Yankees were famous for taking pride in themselves and taking pride in their uniform or their bearing. Harrah's was the same way. You took pride in your appearance and in the job that you performed. I didn't think about it at the time that it was a watershed, but looking back on it, it's easy to see that it was a watershed. How many people were cognizant of that fact is hard to say. I just operated with the theory that we're doing the best we can, and it's getting better all the time, not realizing we were setting new standards for the industry.

In summary, could you describe the changes that took place in the six years that you were there?

I think the two biggest changes were the improvement of entertainment and the change in personnel. When I first went to work there, the entertainment facilities consisted of a small (6,500 square feet) South Shore Room in the Lake Club. I don't recall how many people it held. There was a small stage bar that

could handle groups of two or three people. Many of the entertainers in the South Shore Room were not well known and not nationally recognized. By the time I left Harrah's, the greatest entertainers in the world were appearing at Harrah's. They were seating as many as fourteen hundred a night on a weekday night, between the dinner show and the cocktail show. The entertainment led them on an upward path, and coming to see the entertainers was more of a middle-class, family-type group of people that hadn't been to casinos previously. Gambling became more accepted at that time due, largely, to entertainment. I remember when I first went to work in gambling, you were looked down upon. You were considered a second-class citizen, even in Reno and Tahoe and in many areas in California, but Harrah's got people coming to Lake Tahoe and coming to the shows, and it became a family type of club. A family would come up, and during the daytime they might go to Lake Tahoe to the beach, but at nighttime they would get a babysitter for the kids and come to the shows and then gamble. The shows gave them a reason to come to Lake Tahoe, and it was acceptable to go back to California and say, "I went to Tahoe." So the entertainment changed the type of person that became gamblers. They didn't call themselves gamblers. They didn't look at themselves as gamblers. They went up there to have a good time, but in most cases, gambling was on their itinerary.

Along with the different customer, Harrah's Club developed a different employee. There were the employees that oftentimes had come from college to work in the summertime and had never left the business, but the employees weren't, by any stretch of the imagination, all college students. A lot of them were just nice, normal, clean-cut kids that came up there after having served time in the military or came up a few years after they got out of high school. A lot of kids would come up there at eighteen, nineteen years old and start out in the food and beverage department or in the parking lot. Many young women came there, also. They were screened, to an extent, as far as their appearance and their abilities, and they were funneled into different departments depending upon their skills. Everybody didn't become a dealer, of course. There were people that went to work

in food service. There were people that worked in the bar, and there were people that worked in the offices. Tahoe, at that time, was a desirable place to live. It was a fun place. A lot of employees partied a lot during the daytime. They'd go to the beach and go swimming in summertime, and in the wintertime they would go skiing. So it was a good fun place to come and live and work.

Note

1. The *Harrah-scope* was the monthly house publication or house organ.

BACK TO HAROLDS CLUB: DEALER AND FLOOR MAN

W*HY DID you decide to leave Harrah's?*

For a couple of reasons, actually. One of them was the fact that I had remarried Eugenia, and she had moved to Lake Tahoe, and then I got divorced from Eugenia for the second time, and she stayed at Lake Tahoe after we got divorced. Then I started going out with different girls, and I wasn't comfortable living at Lake Tahoe with Eugenia there.

Second, I just felt I was working too hard. I was working seven days a week, and I was working ten to twelve-hour days. I was seeing some of the older guys, guys fifty or fifty-five years old, having health problems, and I thought their whole life was devoted to Harrah's Club, and they were working too hard, and they weren't getting anywhere. They were getting somewhere in a way, but they were losing their families. They were losing time with their children, and they were losing good quality time. I decided that I didn't want to go through the rest of my life that way, so I decided I would leave. Looking back on it, if I had to do

it all over again, that would be one of the things that I would change. I would have stayed there at Harrah's Club.

Did you give written notice?

No. I told Curly Musso that I was quitting. I gave him a week's notice that I was going to leave, and it was a slow time of year. When I left, it was late November, early December. So it wasn't that big a problem to replace me.

And you didn't have a job?

Did not have a job. I just packed my things in the car and drove to Reno. I really didn't know what I was going to do. I probably thought about going to California. I'm not really sure. For some reason—and I always remember this—I was driving down Center Street, and I parked my car on Center Street. I got out of the car, and as I was putting money in the parking meter, the meter maid came by. Her name was Dede Layton, and I had worked with her at Harolds Club in the early 1950s. I'd seen her off and on through the years, when she would come to Harrah's to see a show. I wasn't friendly with her, but I'd seen her a couple of times, and she said, "Hi, Dwayne, what are you doing?"

I said, "I don't really know what I'm going to do."

She said, "I just was in Harolds Club today, and I heard that they were looking for people." She said, "Why don't you go in there, and maybe you can get a job there."

So I walked in the door, and I ran into a fellow named Steve Derrivan. He was assistant shift manager. He said, "Why don't you put in for a job here?"

I said, "Gee, I don't know. It's December."

By this time it's the first week in December, and in those days nobody hired anyone in December. Clubs usually were cutting down in December, not hiring, but he said, "Well, why don't you put in an application?"

Then Don McDonnell, who was a shift manager, said, "Just put in an application."

So I went to the offices across the street and put in an application, and the lady said, "We'll call you in a few days. What's your phone number?"

I said, "Well, I don't have a phone. I don't even have a place to stay." So I wound up getting a room in a motel on East Fourth Street for a week, until I decided what I was going to do. In two or three days I was interviewed by Steve Derrivan and Glen Botorff and Harold Jr. In less than three or four days I wound up going to work dealing dice on the graveyard shift. It was such a strange feeling for me, because when I had walked into Harrah's Club two weeks prior to that, the whole pit area was under my control. I had at least four hundred people that were in my department. All the games and tables were under my management, and now I walk in at two o'clock in the morning on graveyard, and I've got half of a crap table that is under my jurisdiction. It felt good for awhile. I was tired and burned out, and it felt good to have just that half a crap table as a responsibility.

It must have been a big difference in salary.

Oh, a tremendous drop in salary. I hired in at Harolds Club for twenty dollars a day, and I don't recall if I mentioned earlier what I was making as a pit manager, but I was probably making, maybe, sixty or sixty-five dollars a day. I know the top pit boss pay at Harrah's when I left in 1963 was forty dollars a day. As a dealer I made a few tips or tokes, but not very many. I dealt for a year at Harolds Club, and during that time there were a lot of nights when I didn't make a dollar. First of all, during December, January, February, there's not that much business in the club. Secondly, if there was business in the club, a lot of times you were on a dead game. In those days you kept your own tokes, and on the crap table somebody had to make a bet for you, and then you had to win the bet. So it wasn't that easy to make tokes. The biggest toke I ever made on that graveyard shift in one night—and this is from December of 1963 to December of 1964—was two hundred dollars. I had a few hundred-dollar nights, but there was only one night in an entire year that I made two hundred dollars.

Where did you live when you first came back to Reno?

I lived in a motel for, I'd say, about six weeks, and then I rented an apartment at 245 West Taylor Street, lived in that apartment for almost a year. Then I bought a duplex in Sparks. The monthly payments were low enough so that the rent payments to me made the loan payment. I lived in that duplex for a few years, and then there was a triplex that came up for sale right next to that duplex. So another little down payment got me into that triplex, and the payments from the triplex and the one side of the duplex made all the real estate payments for me. So that's where I lived until 1967. When Stead Air Base closed in 1965 or 1966, there were vacancies all over town, and I wound up with a lot of vacancies in my rentals. I struggled with those rentals for a year or two and finally traded them for the house that we're sitting in right now. Traded the duplex and the triplex for a down payment on this house.

You were promoted to floor man a year after you started to deal?

After a year, yes. I dealt on graveyard for that entire time. It was interesting the way that Harold Jr. put me on the floor. In those days in Harolds Club all the floor men wore *identical* gray suits. They wore a gray suit with a white shirt and a black tie—kind of a uniform. The shift manager wore a dark black or a dark navy blue suit, and the floor men wore the gray suits. So Harold Smith Jr. called me in the office and said, "Do you know Steve Tarn?"

I said, "No, I don't know Steve Tarn."

He says, "Well, Steve Tarn is a tailor here in town, and he makes all our suits. So what I want you to do this morning, when you get off work, is go down to Steve Tarn's tailor shop and tell him that you want to be measured for a gray suit." That was how he told me I was going on the floor. He didn't say how much money it paid, or when I was going to go on the floor, or, "Do you want to go on the floor?" or anything else. [laughter]

That morning when I got off at ten o'clock, I went to Steve Tarn's tailor shop on the corner of Arlington and Second Street

and told Steve Tarn that Junior had sent me down to get a gray suit. So Steve Tarn took all the measurements and said, "Come back in two, three days, and we'll try it on, and it'll be ready in a week." So that was it. In the meantime, I was supposed to start on the floor the very next night. So the first week or so that I worked on the floor, I wore my regular Western clothes. At that time the Harolds Club employees all wore Western clothes. You had to wear cowboy boots and a Western pair of pants and a Western-type shirt. You also wore either a Western tie, or what I always wore, a bolo tie.

Did you have to buy the shirts and the pants from Harolds Club?

All the Western wear was for sale in Harolds Club. They had a complete wardrobe store where you could buy anything Western. It was a lot more reasonable to buy clothes in Harolds Club, but you didn't have to buy them there. If you wanted to go down to Parkers or anywhere else and spend a lot of money and buy a lot of fancy Western clothes, you were more than welcome to do it, and a lot of the dealers did, especially the women.

The floor men were given two gray suits every year, and we bought our own shirts and ties. After a year or two of wearing those gray suits, some of the floor men rebelled and started wearing flowered ties or different color ties, and they let us do that, after awhile, but the first standard regimen was black tie only. [laughter]



Harolds Club, to the best of my knowledge, was the only club of any size that ever operated without a pit. There was never a pit until Harolds Club was sold to Howard Hughes in 1970. The tables were scattered almost indiscriminately around the building, and it's the main reason Harolds Club supervisors were called floor men. There's no way you could call us a pit boss, because we were not in any kind of a pit. There would be some twenty-one tables grouped together, and there might be two dice tables back to back. That was what Harolds Club and most casinos that had more than one dice table did, they would try and locate them back to back. That way, if you had one dice game going, and the dice cooled off

a little, the customers could turn around and fall into another game.

As a floor man you never worked behind those tables. You would go behind there if you were going to make a fill or if you wanted to talk to a dealer or if you wanted to talk to a customer, but when you worked, you worked right out in the floor, right out in those mobs of people. Harolds Club, in those days, used to have mobs of people. On big weekends and on summer nights, you were right out in that mass of people. It was physically tiring just getting around in the crowd, because you had a certain section of the floor that you worked in Harolds Club, a certain section of the floor that you covered, and when you were needed at a game, you might have to cover twenty, twenty-five yards in a very short time, and you were pushing through crowds to get there.

During the time that I was on the floor, which was from 1963 to 1971, each shift had their own crew. You had a shift manager, and you had the second in command, and you had the third in command. The second and third men filled in for the shift manager on vacations, days off, and things of that nature. When I first went on the floor you would work four months on the same shift. You'd work four months graveyard, four months day, and four months swing, and so on. There were always a lot of different feelings on it, because some people wanted to work swing, and some wanted to work days, and some wanted to work graveyard. Then about two years after I went on the floor, they came up with the idea that you would work a year on a shift, and at the end of that year you would go onto the next shift. Graveyard, of course, had a few less floor men than the other shifts, but as a general rule, the entire shift would move at the end of a year.

I was with the same crew from 1964 until I left in 1971. Our shift manager was a fellow named Chuck Webster, Charles "Chuck" Webster. He had come out of North Dakota and gone to work in Harolds Club in, probably, 1937 or 1938. He was a popular, well-liked individual, possibly one of the most popular floor men that ever worked at Harolds Club, although there were a lot of bosses that were well-liked. He served in the military during World War II, and after he came back from the service, he became a floor man and worked there until 1970. When Howard

Hughes took over, they replaced all the shift managers and the casino managers, so Chuck was terminated. The thing I liked about Chuck was that he believed in giving everyone at least two chances. He would listen to your problems, and if you needed some extra time off, or if you wanted to go some place or do something, he was very understanding. Talk about second chances—the first time that I worked on the floor for Chuck Webster, somebody caught a guy handmucking cards. Well, Chuck took him in the office, sat him down and talked to him like he was a father talking to his son. He said, “Now, you know you shouldn’t be doing this cheating in here, and I really don’t want you doing any cheating in here anymore. I’m not going to do anything to you. I’m going to put you out of here, and I’m going to ask you not to ever come in here again.” [laughter] He was so mild-mannered and so forgiving that I think the crossroader was in a state of shock, but he got up and left, and, to the best of my knowledge, he never did come back in there again.

Chuck was the same way with a dealer. If a dealer came into work late or came in drunk or did something out of line, he would give him another chance, and, of course, a lot of people got more than two chances.

Did he ever give you a second chance?

No, he never gave me a second chance. I never needed a second chance from him. I needed it from a few other people in my life, but Chuck never had to give me a second chance. [laughter] I didn’t mess up with Chuck, but I certainly did follow and believe in his philosophy. In later years, I always gave everyone at least two chances, and I gave some people a lot of third and fourth chances, too.

What other influence did he exert on your career?

He taught me by example how important it was to keep your employees happy. He would bend over backwards to make sure that the employees got the days off they liked. He tried to give them the tables they liked whenever possible, and he would give

them the vacation time that they wanted. He was a firm believer in "A happy employee is a good employee." I carried that theory out the rest of my life, too, in all the rest of the management jobs that I had. The most important thing you can do for an employee is to make them happy. Practically everybody has to work forty hours a week or more. Why not try and make that work time as enjoyable as possible? If you don't like coming to work, or if you dread coming to work, you aren't going to put forth a good attitude when you do get to work. If you can have your employee coming to work happy and enjoying their job, it's going to reflect on the customer. That in turn makes the customer happy and makes the club a success.

We had about twelve people on our shift all the time, and we were all around the same age, thirty to thirty-five. The only older person was Chuck Webster. Chuck was quite a bit older than we were and was kind of a father figure to a lot of us, but he was a follower of the old Harolds Club theory of really not following many rules or procedures, and our crew of "Young Turks" disagreed with that. Harold Smith Jr. was probably three or four years younger than I was, and he was really the ramrod of the casino in those days. So he liked all of us younger guys. This was when card counting was starting to become more prevalent, say in 1963, 1964, in around that time frame, and the older floor men didn't believe that it was possible for card counters to beat the game. They thought card counting was just a phase, and they couldn't see why everybody was all in an uproar about it. They didn't believe that a good counter can beat a twenty-one game, if something isn't done to stop him.

What did you do when you found somebody counting?

Well, policy changed over the years, but there were some counters that we would just deal one hand to, and then shuffle the deck over again. Some counters we would deal halfway through the deck and then shuffle. Some counters we would just go up to them and tell them that we didn't really care to have their action on the twenty-one game. They were more than welcome to shoot craps or play slots or eat in our restaurant or to drink in our bar,

but we didn't want them playing twenty-one, period. That, to me, was the best way. If you were definitely certain that the person was a counter, why bother with shuffling the deck every time, or why bother with shuffling it when you're halfway through? Actually, when you shuffle the deck after one hand, all you're doing is wasting time, and you aren't really getting that much the best of it. I know Harrah's in 1964 tried shuffling after every hand, and there was a mass exodus out of Harrah's. Harolds Club was located right across the alley from Harrah's, and you could just see people coming in that back door from Harrah's into Harolds, and they were all complaining about how you couldn't even sit down and play twenty-one. Our business increased tremendously, but Harrah's Club did away with that program after about two to three days. They soon found out that they were running everyone out of the club.

Were you there when Pappy Smith died?

Yes, I was. Pappy died in 1967. None of our crew were really "Pappy's boys," other than our shift manager, Chuck Webster—he was close with Pappy—but the rest of us all were on the floor, because Harold Jr. wanted us on the floor. I remember the day of Pappy's funeral. It was on Memorial Day weekend in 1967. The older floor men on day shift were long-time employees of Harolds Club and had been close to Pappy. So when Pappy's funeral started at ten o'clock in the morning, our group continued to work on the floor. We'd come to work at two in the morning, and when the funeral started we just kept right on working. We worked about eleven or twelve hours that day so that the older floor men could attend the funeral.

You said earlier that floor men and their wives worked together on the same shift, and that sometimes the bosses scheduled their wives on better tables?

Yes, it was common practice at Harolds Club for men and wives to work on the same shift. The Smith family encouraged families to work there, and they liked it when a man and wife

would work together. It was commonplace for a man and wife to both be dealers and work on the same shift. The only thing they didn't do was let two dice dealers, a man and wife, work together on the same dice table. But there were a lot of floor men that had their wives working as dealers. You could even bring money to her game and fill up her table when she needed it. It was commonplace for the floor manager's wife to get the better tables, the better tables being the ones that had good location, and the ones where the dealers made more tokens. One of the reasons for that was the fact that the floor managers' wives had usually worked there a lot longer than some of the other dealers, and they were more experienced and, oftentimes, better dealers, but the average dealer never did understand that. However, the policy was abused at times. There were some younger floor men who got married and scheduled their inexperienced wives on good tables.

A lot of the dealers would keep the same table for years. There were changes, for example, only when, maybe, someone went on vacation for two or three weeks, or if an older dealer got sick or had to be off work, or if they retired. Then you had these key spots that you had to fill in, and those were the ones that sometimes dealers complained about—the fact that the floor managers' wives got the jobs.

There was a lady in Harolds Club named Bessie Hoyt who had come to work at Harolds Club in the early 1940s and was still working there in the 1970s when Harolds Club sold out to the Hughes Corporation. She had dealt number five twenty-one for probably twenty years. When the Hughes organization came into Harolds Club, of course, they didn't like an awful lot of things that Harolds Club did, and one of the first things they did was move the dealers around to different locations. One night Bessie came into work right after the Hughes Corporation had taken over, and she came up to me, and she wanted to know where twelve twenty-one was. She had no idea where it was, and it was only about ten feet from where she'd been dealing for the last twenty years. She was very distraught, very upset. She was a conscientious person, and she wanted to do the right thing. By that time Bessie was a little older. She was probably in her late fifties, maybe even sixty years old. So, of course, she wanted to maintain her job. She wanted to

hang onto her job, and she wanted to do what was right, but she was flustered, I guess, is the best word.

How did it feel to you to be in a situation where all those radical changes were taking place?

Well, I tried to cope with it for about six or seven months. I think I mentioned earlier that when the Howard Hughes people came in, we thought this is really great. We're going to get some real knowledgeable people in here that have worked in these big clubs, and we felt that we were really going to learn from them, but it wasn't long until we found out that they weren't any more knowledgeable than we were, and they didn't know anything that we didn't know. So I tried to get along with them. I did the best I could to work with them, but I soon came to the conclusion that this wasn't going to be the right kind of a place for me to work.

Almost every dealer that had been there for any length of time had a table that they went to every shift, and the floor men that had worked there twenty or thirty years had worked in the same areas for twenty or thirty years. So when a customer came in, they always knew where Bessie was working or where Ken was working or where Dwayne was working, and they could go right to that spot. In the early years when I was dealing at Harolds Club, for awhile I worked days off. I filled in for people on their days off, and people would come up to number ten dice and say, "Oh, where's Lou?"

And I'd say, "Well, Lou's off tonight. I'm working for him." They wouldn't even play at my table, not because of me, but because they're used to playing with Lou. So they would go play at some other table, and then the next night when Lou came back, then they would play dice with Lou on number ten dice. Dealers developed a tremendous following, and that was a big plus for Harolds Club, because there were tens of thousands of customers that came into Reno in those days, the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, that never went to another club at all. This was prior to Harrah's Club opening their hotel. So a lot of the people that came to Reno and came into Harolds Club stayed at various motels around town. They would go from their motel to Harolds Club, back to

their motel, and go to bed, and that would be about all they would see of Reno. The majority of Harolds Club customers never played anywhere else, except in Harolds Club.

Did the floor bosses have a following?

They did to a degree, but there really wasn't much that floor men could do for a customer. Their credit or their check cashing was all handled through the credit office. Floor men had nothing to do with that. Markers had to be okayed out of the credit office. We could give meal tickets for a breakfast or a lunch, and there was a certain time frame where we could buy dinners for high-rolling customers, but there really wasn't much that a floor man could do for a customer other than just be friendly and nice. Also, the size of Harolds Club and the few floor men that we had working there didn't allow a floor man a lot of time to stand around and visit and talk with people. You would get to know their name and chat for awhile; that was about it. The first two floors had a lot of gaming activity, and there was also gaming activity on the seventh floor. For awhile there was gaming activity on the third floor where the restaurant was located, so when you were covering such a large area of gaming, it was tough for customers to find you.

A lot of floor men would try and get a relationship going between their wife and a customer. They would lead the customer over to their wife and introduce him to her and sit them down at her table and maybe buy them a drink and give them a meal ticket. They were doing that for the sole purpose of that customer giving tokens to their wife.



I met my wife, Rose, at Harolds Club when she was dealing twenty-one. She had started out like just about everyone else did—carrying change. She started to work there in 1965, and was soon offered the opportunity to deal. In those days they would start learning to deal by racking checks on a roulette wheel. That would get them used to being around customers and to get the feel of handling roulette chips or handling silver and handling the five-dollar chips. If the game were slow, the regular dealer would let

them spin the ball and maybe deal to one or two customers. One of the big reasons for them starting out as check rackers was to see how they got along with people and to get them used to working with people and getting over the fear of coming in contact with people. A few of them would become roulette dealers, but most people didn't want to become roulette dealers at Harolds Club, because at that time the dealers kept their own tokens, and roulette has never been a moneymaker as far as tokens are concerned. There was a certain type of person that liked to deal roulette, but they were few and far between.

After check racking, most of the girls breaking in would deal a twenty-five-cent table. At that time in the 1960s Harolds Club had three twenty-five-cent tables, and that's where the break-in dealers learned. On weekends they would raise the minimum to a dollar on all except one table. They always kept one twenty-five-cent table minimum in Harolds Club up until 1971, when Hughes came in. The twenty-five cent tables were full all the time. You had the older people or people on pensions or retirement, or once in awhile you'd get a few young kids come in there that would play quarters, but can you imagine dealing to seven hands of twenty-five-cent pieces all night? A big bet at that table was a dollar. [laughter] Of course, a lot of the players were always trying to take advantage of the dealer. They'd try and add on to their bet if they won, or they would try to switch their cards, or do anything just to see what they could get away with on that table.

How long was it before you noticed Rose?

Actually, when she started work, I was working on a different shift. She started on swing, and I was working days at the time. So she had probably worked there six or eight months before I came on swing shift. By then she was dealing quarter twenty-one, once or twice a week, maybe pull two or three shifts on a dollar table and a shift or two racking checks. She hadn't been dealing long enough to be on a full-time dollar table. When I first noticed her, she was racking checks on a roulette table, and at work I was always very serious. I always walked around with a serious look on my face, and I was intent and paying attention to games and

customers, and when I walked by her one time she said, “Hi, Smiley.” Those were the first words she ever said to me, and it was “Hi, Smiley,” because I wasn’t smiling. It was a complete contradiction, and looking back I am surprised that she was brave enough to say that, because I was pretty serious-looking. [laughter]

So, of course, then I smiled and said, “Hi.” And then after that I smiled and said hi a few times, and then a few weeks after that I said, “Why don’t you meet me for a drink after work?” So we had a drink after work and then started going out together.

One thing led to another, and I would say probably about fourteen to sixteen months after I met Rose we were married. We were married on November 26, 1967. The funny thing was—I mentioned earlier how the floor men change shifts every year—I was working the graveyard shift, and Rose was working swing. The day we got married I got off work at ten o’clock in the morning after having worked the graveyard shift, and Rose had worked the swing shift the night before, so she’d gotten off at two o’clock in the morning. We were married about twelve or one o’clock that afternoon, so I’d already put in eight hours working, when we were married in a Reno wedding chapel. My two daughters, Michelle and Connie, were living at Lake Tahoe at the time, and they came down to Reno on a bus to go to the wedding. Then after the wedding we drove to Lake Tahoe and dropped them off at their mother’s house there at Tahoe, and then we were going to try and drive to San Francisco, but by that time I hadn’t been to bed for I don’t know how many hours. It was pushing twenty hours that I hadn’t been to sleep, so we stopped in Rancho Cordova and spent the night there. But you work different shifts like that when you work in the casino business; it’s a different life.

Did Rose stay on swing shift?

Yes. She stayed on swing, and I stayed on graveyard. She didn’t care to work graveyard. When Rose and I were married, she had a daughter named Debbie. Debbie was six years old when we got married. So she stayed on swing, and I worked graveyard, so between the two of us we watched over Debbie. Of course,

sometimes we'd get a babysitter, but usually we handled it by ourselves. So, probably the first eight or ten months we were married we did work different shifts. When I went to days she did come on day shift, and we both worked day shift together for a year.

Did she have enough seniority at that point to get a good table?

No. She got what was called a day's off schedule. She worked on various tables when the regular dealer was off. It didn't hurt her any that she was married to a floor man, but she still didn't really have enough experience to warrant a really good table. You had to be there a long time to earn the right to have a permanent good table.



"When Rose and I were married, she had a daughter named Debbie. Debbie was six years old when we got married." Debbie in 1997 with her husband, Jaime Zamora, and their three children, Allison, Chad, and Scott.

I would imagine from her personality—she is a very friendly person—that she would have had a good customer following, particularly if she could have gotten a table where she could have developed it.

Yes, that's right.

Who was the best man at your wedding?

The best man at my wedding was a fellow named Steve Barela. I first met Steve in 1963 when I came to Harolds Club from Harrah's at Lake Tahoe. I started out dealing on graveyard, as I mentioned, and Steve Barela had been dealing, maybe, about six months to a year at that time, also on graveyard. Steve and I would work together on the dice table, maybe, two or three times a week. Steve was married to a girl named Madeline, and they had two children, Teresa and Chrissie. On graveyard you always have a lot of time to stand around and visit, and we got to know each other quite well. He talked me into going bowling, and I don't think I'd ever bowled before in my life. That was something that Harolds Club employees did a lot. They always had a lot of company bowling leagues. Some of the teams were co-ed teams, and some of the teams were men teams. The interesting thing about it was a lot of times the teams would be composed of floor managers and dealers. There was no line of demarcation between the dealers and the supervisors. We'd get off work at ten o'clock in the morning and go to one of those bowling leagues and bowl and visit.

Another thing that Harolds Club employees would do was go out to Pyramid Lake. A group of people would set up trailers out there and then leave their trailers up there almost all summer. Then, on their days off they would drive out there. Some of them would actually commute between Pyramid Lake and Harolds Club, do a lot of water-skiing, a lot of barbecuing, and a lot of beer drinking and a lot of boat riding.

Even after I went on the floor, Steve and I maintained a very close relationship. Steve liked the way I handled people, the way I handled customers, and the different people that I knew that would come in and visit with me. One time we went up to the

seventh floor and met a friend of mine who was at that time the entertainment editor for the *Oakland Tribune*. He took Steve and I backstage at Harolds Club to meet Trini Lopez. Trini Lopez, of course, was a Hispanic singer, and Steve Barela, being a Mexican, was thrilled to death to meet Trini Lopez. Steve was always gracious to me. I was single at that time, and I was over to Steve and Madeline's house a great deal. We would go there and have dinner together or have breakfast together after we got off work. When my kids would come into town, I'd bring them up to Steve and Madeline's house, so we developed a real close relationship, and there was nothing that ever changed when I went on the floor. In a lot of clubs or organizations, if you're on a certain level, you don't visit or associate with people on a different management level, but that was never a problem at Harolds Club.

Another thing about Harolds Club was that people were almost happy to go to work. For example, my wife Rose is a very gregarious person, and she would look forward to going to work and seeing Sally or Bonnie or Mary. It wasn't like, "Gee, I've got to go to work," and it's a drudge. It was almost like a party to go to work in a way. Naturally, it wasn't fun every night, but you didn't dread going to work. You looked forward to seeing your friends that you worked with and seeing your customers. The floor managers were pleasant and didn't bother the dealers. Plus the Smith family treated you almost like a family. If you needed money, or if you needed time off—if you needed anything—you could go up and talk to Harold Sr. or Pappy, or you could talk to Harold Jr. How many places were there like that, where the owners were that accessible, and you had the freedom to talk to them? The Smith family helped a lot of people in a lot of ways.

You were talking about Steve and Steve's friendship. What happened to Steve?

Steve was eventually promoted to a floor man. Then, one of the tragedies of my life happened. In 1972 Steve had been out to Pyramid Lake on his day off, and as he was driving back into town he lost control of his automobile, and he was killed in an automobile accident. So I lost my best friend at that time.

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When was Harolds Club sold?

June of 1970.

You've already said that you were looking forward to working with the knowledgeable Las Vegas people. What were they really like?

The biggest difference with the Las Vegas people that came in was—and you've heard this all your life—they weren't friendly. They weren't customer-oriented like the northern Nevada people. I've seen it so many times. When Vegas people came up to open the MGM or the Circus Circus or the Reno Sahara, they all had big ideas and big plans to turn northern Nevada into southern Nevada, but their plans never worked. They do not value the customer. They don't extend the friendliness to the customer that northern Nevada always does. They think that the customer is obligated to them. In Harolds Club and Harrah's the customer always came first. Every possible thing was done for the customer. The Las Vegas people that they sent up here didn't treat them that way.

What did it mean to you as a person?

When they first came in, I thought, "Gee, this is going to be great." But within a very short time I could see that I wasn't going to be happy there. One of the first things they tried to do was to form the table games into pits. It was really tough to arrange the table games into pits, because Harolds Club had been built by an add-on here and an add-on there. It wasn't like they built this big building and then put a gaming casino in it. They started out with bits and pieces of thirty feet here and forty feet there, and as things got added on, there was always a pillar standing in the middle, or there was a column here, or there was a support beam going there. So the games were scattered around helter-skelter. They did manage to get a few pits put together, but it was no way like you'd see in any other casino.

One night I'm standing in a pit with four twenty-one tables, and I was watching a well-known player who had out about five hundred dollars in five-dollar chips. I had asked him if he wanted twenty-five-dollar chips, and he said he didn't; he liked having all these five-dollar chips. I was watching the game and just talking with the customer and having a good time and visiting with him, because I'd watched this guy play a dozen times. I knew there was nothing wrong with his play. As I'm standing there talking, here comes this new fellow that they'd brought up from Las Vegas to be second in command of the shift. He came up to the pit and he actually *jumped* over the chain to get in the pit. [laughter] He put one hand on each twenty-one table and jumped over the chain—which had to be three feet high. [laughter] After he jumped into the pit he said, "What's going on here? How come this guy has out all this money? Why didn't somebody let me know what was going on around here?"

I thought, "Geez, the guy's only got five hundred dollars out." I said to him, "It's no big deal. He only has five hundred dollars out." I'm thinking these guys are from Vegas, and you hear all these stories about Vegas, where they win or lose ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty thousand, and here some poor guy's got about five hundred dollars, and this guy's having a panic attack and jumps over the chain.

Well, he just chewed me out unmercifully, chastised me for not letting him know that this kind of play was going on—and the guy was only betting about fifty dollars a hand at the most. He said, "How come you didn't upgrade him to twenty-five-dollar chips?"

I said, "Well, he didn't want to go to twenty-fives; he wanted to stay in fives; he feels lucky with them."

He said, "I don't care whether he wanted to do it or not. You got to get these people into twenty-five-dollar chips. You can't be letting them get all this money out in five-dollar chips. We'll never get it back that way!" I knew that the best thing to do was put him into twenty-five-dollar chips, but I also knew that a better thing to do is to keep your customer happy, and if he wants five-dollar chips, give him five-dollar chips.

Dealers could always play in Harolds Club when they got off work, and Hughes didn't change that right away, although I think they did change it, eventually. One night I was working graveyard, and one of our swing shift dealers started playing, and she got a little lucky, and she had about, probably, four or five hundred dollars in front of her. At Harolds Club in those times, and for many prior years, if one of the employees got a little lucky and won a little bit of money, you would take care of them. Take the money away from them if they're drunk, get their money, and put them in a cab. If they're just playing normally, and they made a score or made a winning, just say, "Hey, why don't you quit? You've got enough money—get out of here."

So I was talking to this girl. Her name was Arthel, and here comes this same guy again. [laughter] He hears me telling Arthel to take her money and go home, and he really became very upset over that, very irritable. [laughter] He said, "When somebody's ahead, you don't tell them to get their money and get out of here. You keep them here, or you get them another drink. You try and keep them playing on the table. Get that money back. What are you trying to do? Whose side are you on?"

I said, "Well, at Harolds Club we've always done this. We've always tried to take care of the winners."

He said, "Well, you don't do that anymore, and it isn't Harolds Club anymore. Harold sold the club! Summa Corporation [a Hughes company] owns the club." [laughter] So I knew I was becoming high on their not-liked list about that time. Those were two of the run-in's that I had with the people from Vegas.

Do you remember who he was?

Oh, yes, I know him well. I'll never forget his name. [laughter] His name was Richard Balkanny. He'd worked at the Silver Slipper for a long time with Jack Pieper, who was club manager of Harolds Club at that time. Jack Pieper was later named the first general manager of MGM when it opened in 1978. As soon as the MGM opened, then Richard Balkanny went to work with Pieper at MGM. Balkanny was an OK guy. He just didn't fit in with my way of thinking. [laughter]

So how long was it before you decided your way of thinking needed to find a new place?

[laughter] Well, I had a philosophy, still do have a philosophy: if you're working for somebody, you give them absolutely, at least a 100 percent effort at your job, maybe 110. When the time comes that you feel that you can't do that, then it is time for you to go to work someplace else. So, ironically, about a night or two after this happened, a fellow named Norm Brown came in for a drink. Norm Brown had worked at Harolds Club for a long time and had been part of the "Young Turk" group that was on our crew. He left Harolds Club shortly after Howard Hughes took over, because he saw the handwriting on the wall. He wasn't happy with the way it was going, and so he had a chance to go across the street to the Silver Spur as the casino manager. He'd asked me when he went over to the Silver Spur if I wanted to leave Harolds Club and go to work for him, and I said, "I'm going to try it here and see how it goes." So after I had that disagreement with Balkanny, I went over to the bar, and I said to Norm, "Is that job offer still good at the Silver Spur? Do you have an opening?" [laughter]

He said, "Well, I don't right now, but I think I'm going to have one in a couple of days." He said, "Why don't you come over and talk to me in a couple of days." So in a couple of days I went over and talked to him, and, of course, he hired me then at the Silver Spur.

Did Rose stay at Harolds Club?

We've got to go back in time a little bit for me to answer that. Howard Hughes took over in June of 1970, and in about October or November of 1970, Howard Hughes, or Summa Corporation or Jack Pieper, came up with the idea that floor men could not work the same shift as their wives. Well, that didn't bother us too much. It bothered practically all the other floor men, because most of the floor men's wives worked the same shift that they did, but it didn't bother Rose and I, because at that time I was on graveyard, and Rose was on swing, but it was kind of irritating, and we didn't think it was very nice that you couldn't work the same shift as

your wife. They didn't want you working the same shift as your wife, because they thought that you would get into collusion, and you'd be collaborating to steal money off the games.

So that was the first thing they did: they said the wives couldn't work the same shift as their husbands. Then the next thing they did, probably about a month later, just shortly before Christmas, they said floor men's wives could not work in Harolds Club. If you were a floor man, you either quit, or your wife quit. Both of you could not be employed at Harolds Club. Well, naturally, that hit us pretty hard, financially. It was really irritating to me. I felt that if you were a floor manager or a supervisor of any kind, they should have some consideration for you, and they should trust you enough to let your wife work there. So that really started bugging me more than anything. That happened in December, and a short time later is when I decided I would go to the Silver Spur and go to work.

Well, Dan Orlich was still casino manager of Harolds at that time. It was February of 1971, and I went to Dan and said that I was going to leave. He said, "Well, I really hate to see you go, Dwayne. There's so many Harolds Club employees going." He said, "Probably won't be too many of us left here much longer." Ironically, in about four months they got rid of him, and he was gone, too. [laughter] But he said, "Well, I want you to talk to Jack Pieper and tell him why you're leaving."

So I went up and talked to Jack Pieper, and it was the first time that I'd really talked to him. He'd been there several months, but I never had the occasion to talk to him, and he had never made a point to come and talk to me individually. He'd held meetings, but he'd never talked to me individually. So he asked me why I was leaving, and I told him. He said, "Well, I really hate to see you go, because I've heard from everyone that I brought up here with me that they think quite highly of you, and you're one of the best floor managers here." [laughter]

I said, "Well, you should have told me that about a month or two ago. I might have felt differently about it." But I said, "In the state of mind that I'm in now," I said, "I think it's just better that I leave and go across the street." Ironically, I took a five-dollar a day cut in pay to go across the street and go to work, but I just felt

so much better mentally that I would rather take the cut in pay than stay there any longer. However, there were several Harolds Club people that did stay there and wound up becoming casino executives. One fellow, Glen Botorff, even became casino manager at Harolds Club for a short time. So there was the potential for promotion there. If I hadn't had a job offer, I might have stayed there, but I don't really think I would have, because I really felt that if you couldn't do the best for your employer, then you should get out of there.

What did Rose do?

Rose went to beauty school. Financially, that was another really tough time in our life, because I'd taken that five-dollar-a-day cut in pay. I think I started at the Silver Spur at forty dollars a day, and I worked six days, so that was \$240 a week, and that's all we had. We lost all of Rose's income, because she had decided that she would rather be a hairdresser than stay in the gaming business. Beauty school took almost a year, and by the time she got her license, she was tired of doing hair. [laughter]

It's tougher to work on a lady's hair than it is to deal twenty-one to them. Plus, there's no tips, no tokes, and the wages weren't that good, either. I don't remember what the wages were, but it was more of a hassle to fool with somebody's hair than it was to deal cards to them. So she got her license, but she never did go to work as a beauty operator, she went back to dealing.

She went to work at Jessie Beck's Riverside, because when Jessie Beck opened the Riverside, practically her entire crew were ex-Harolds Club people. Most of the floor men's wives went to work there after they got fired out of Harolds Club. Jessie Beck and her late husband, Fred Beck, had operated the keno concession at Harolds Club since the 1940s. They originally had the keno and the pan game and the poker game, but eventually pan and poker died out. After Fred Beck died, then the keno game was all hers. When Howard Hughes's Summa Corporation came in, they broke the lease that Jessie Beck had. So they, in effect, kicked Jessie Beck out of Harolds Club, after she'd had the keno game there for around thirty years, but they did pay her a certain

amount of money when they put her out of there. Of course, she had made millions of dollars over the period of years in that keno game. So she bought the Riverside and opened it up. She took her keno people down there, her keno shift managers, and she made them shift managers of the Riverside Hotel. She named Don McDonnell, who was a one-time casino manager of Harolds Club, as the casino manager of the Riverside. She took Jim Hunter, who at one time had been the chief operating officer of Harolds Club, and put him in public relations and advertising at the Riverside.

She hired an awful lot of dealers out at Harolds Club, because one other major change that Summa Corporation did shortly after they took over was to have the dealers split their tokens. For years one of the big pluses of Harolds Club had been that the dealers got to keep their own tokens. So now, by making the dealers split their tokens, they caused a lot of ill will and hard feelings.

Did Rose like the new job?

Rose liked the Riverside job quite a bit. She worked there until 1978.

Would you summarize your years at Harolds Club?

Well, they were probably the best years of my life, as far as having fun. I enjoyed Harrah's Club, too, and I guess I had a good time just about every place I worked, but at Harolds Club we had a good crew. We had usually about twelve people on the shift. We had a good boss, Chuck Webster. I mentioned Chuck before, but if you needed anything, if you needed time off or anything, Chuck would get it for you. He made your job easier for you.

Even though we were the "Young Turks," an awful lot of us have passed away. Chuck, of course, was a lot older. Chuck died several years ago. The second man on the shift was a fellow named Steve Derrivan. He was about my age. He came out of San Francisco and was a very knowledgeable gaming person. He was second in charge of the shift. Steve passed away last year. Third man on the shift was Cornel Fagetan. Cornel and Derrivan were good friends, and Cornel has also passed away. Bob Donnelly was

on our shift. He passed away. Joe Devers, who was a famous trap shooter—probably, along with Dan Orlich, one of the two best trap shooters in the state of Nevada—has also passed away. Another one was a fellow named Jerry Sicka. Jerry and I were good friends. We were the hardworking guys on the shift; we did most of the work. That's what we say, anyhow. [laughter] Jerry wound up staying at Harolds Club, and he was a top casino executive for a few years there before finishing out his career at the Eldorado. He just retired a couple of years ago. Norm Brown, as I mentioned earlier, was on our crew for a long time, but he left to go to the Silver Spur and then wound up as casino manager of the Monte Carlo for many years.

Harolds Club was a unique organization. As we've said before, you looked forward to going to work, and you had a good time when you went to work. I had a good time after work at Harrah's Club, but in Harolds Club there were very few days that you didn't really look forward to going to work. There were relationships founded there that have survived many decades. So the big difference between Harolds and Harrah's was that Harolds was a less stressful job, and it was more of a "fun" place to work.

There is a club called the Harolds Club Pioneers. Would you tell us about that?

Harolds Club Pioneers is the name of an organization that was founded shortly after Harolds Club was sold from the Summa Corporation to the Lincoln Management group. It originally consisted of people who weren't working in gambling anymore and that had worked at Harolds Club for at least ten years. The rules have recently been relaxed a little bit. Now you can still be working in a casino, and you don't have to have worked there ten years. It's an organization of around one hundred fifty former employees of Harolds Club. They have monthly meetings, and currently they're meeting at the Holiday Hotel¹ every third Wednesday of the month. There are also two parties that are held every year. There's a summer picnic party usually held at Rock Park, and there's a Christmas get-together held at the Elks Club. The Christmas party used to be held at Harolds Club, until it

closed, but is now held at the Elks Club. Christmastime we'll have around one hundred fifty people show up for the party, and the summer picnic has about the same amount of people.

Who organizes all that?

Well, currently one of the main organizers is a lady named Jo Schellin. She started at Harolds Club probably in the late 1950s. The president of the organization is a gentleman named Dave Cable. Dave worked as a dealer, as a floor man, and as head of surveillance in Harolds Club for many years. He's assisted by the vice president of the organization, a fellow named Neal Cobb. Everybody kind of works together. There are several people who work on the party committee. They also have a Sunshine chairman, a lady named Jean Peterson. She keeps track of who's sick and who's in the hospital and who's recuperating, and she sends cards and letters to those people. It's kind of a teamwork thing; everybody helps in one way or another. There's a lady named Helen Dominguez that's very active in the organization, and Pat Sims, Edna Corban, Elizabeth Smith, Kent Wright, and many, many more. The dues are fifteen dollars a year, and the Pioneers donate money to all sorts of worthy causes and people that are in need of help. They keep a balance of around four thousand dollars in the bank, even though they are donating money to worthy causes throughout the year, and it just seems to go on and on and on. You would think with the natural attrition that it would grow smaller, but it seems like there's always somebody new joining. At the Christmas party this year we had almost one hundred fifty people. That's about as large a Christmas as they've had.

How do people know it's there? How do new people join in?

Basically, through word of mouth. Members meet somebody else that used to work at Harolds Club, and they say, "Do you know about the Pioneers? Why don't you come to a meeting and get together with us?"

When you get together for lunch at the Holiday, what kind of an agenda do you have?

Meetings are very short. They call them business meetings, but the actual business meeting only lasts about a half an hour. It's run very efficiently by David Cable. Dave follows parliamentary procedure very thoroughly. He calls the meeting to order, has the minutes from the last meeting read, and any proposals that are made as far as donating money to any charitable causes, motions have to be made and seconded, and an oral vote is taken. If someone has passed away, notice is made of that person passing away, and oftentimes the Pioneers will send a monetary gift to the family of the deceased. A lady named Vicki Nash is the secretary, and she handles all the paperwork. The monthly meetings are also a chance for people to get together and just visit and talk about the old days and talk about their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The large majority of the people that go to the business meetings are people that are completely retired and it gives them a chance to get out and about and be around people they're comfortable with and enjoy talking to.

How long have you been attending?

I don't go to many of the monthly meetings, but I've probably been going to the Christmas parties for fifteen years, at least. Even when I was working full-time I'd go to Christmas parties.

You talked knowledgeably about it, as if you might have been an officer?

No. I was never an officer. I was offered the opportunity to run for vice president one year, but I was too busy at the time to get involved with it. I do help at the Christmas parties. At the party you are assigned a door prize number, and we also sell tickets for cash prizes, and half the money is donated to a charitable cause, and the other half the person keeps. So I'm on the microphone a lot emceeing it and keeping things going. I try to get everybody to come up to the center of the stage, so they can see and be seen by

everyone that's there. A lot of times you go to a big party like that, and you sit in a certain corner, and you don't get a chance to visit with anybody. As a lot of people get older, they get shyer. They don't care to get up there and talk, but I try and get everybody up there and have them say something.

You seem to have a pretty good memory for people's names. Have you worked at that?

I have worked on it over the years; I feel that it's important. The most important thing a person has is his name, and if you can remember someone's name and what they did and where they worked, it makes them feel good. I worked on the schedule at Harolds Club on swing shift for a couple of years, and, as we've mentioned before, the dealers were on the same table the majority of the time. So I'll get up there and say, "Oh, there's Eleanor Douglass, she dealt thirty-two twenty-one." Or I'll say something about someone that dealt fifteen twenty-one, and it just amazes them that I can remember that after all those years. Part of it is because I made an effort to remember their names and where they dealt. It's part of my job, and I enjoy giving them recognition.

The people who belong to this club are pretty much former dealers and floor bosses?

Yes. Most of them are pit people. There's a few people from slots and some from the credit office and the cashier's cage, but the pit was by far the largest department in those days, so the majority of the members are pit people. A lot of people belong to the club and don't go to anything but the parties. You don't have to belong to the club to go to the party, you can come with a friend or a spouse. The same thing is true of the business meeting. You can bring friends and guests, but it's pretty much exclusively for the people who used to work at Harolds Club. And you figure I'm one of the younger ones, and I'm sixty-eight, so, you know, there's a lot of people at those meetings that are over seventy.

It's a fascinating thing. I can't imagine that there's a Harrah's Pioneer Club or a Cal-Neva Pioneer Club.

I doubt there's another one in the whole state of Nevada. There's none in the gaming business that I've ever heard of.

Also, at Harolds Club the people took care of each other. You see a certain amount of that now in some of the clubs. If someone gets sick, or they have a baby, or if someone dies, collections are always being taken. They gather some money together to help somebody with their family problems. So that had a lot to do with it, too. There were friendships and family situations started there that have been maintained over the years.

You said that people worked there a long time; you liked going to work; and you formed friendships. I can understand that if you work there a long time, you naturally form friendships, but why was it different? Why did people like going to work there? Why did you like going to work there?

Well, it was very relaxed. There were no pressure situations. Very seldom did you ever hear of any floor man or shift manager complaining or bitching about somebody winning some money. If a dealer or a shift *lost* a great deal of money, you never heard about it. Management was truly happy when some players won. You see some clubs nowadays, or in those days, too, make a pretense of being happy when a player wins, but in Harolds Club they were really happy when somebody won, and that's part of the pressure in other clubs—you have to win a certain amount of money or, a lot of times, pit bosses get upset.

Also, they weren't concerned about wages. In Harrah's Club when you scheduled a swing shift, even if you had 120 or 130 dealers coming in, you brought in the exact amount of dealers scheduled. You didn't over schedule, and you sent people home if you did. In Harolds Club they would schedule as many as ten to fifteen people extra every night. You were scheduled as an extra, and an extra covered for someone that didn't show up or for somebody that came in and got sick. If somebody wanted to go

home, then the extra would be put to work, but if no one wanted to go home, or if there was no place for the extra person to deal, he would either just sit in the rec [recreation] room all night and get paid, or after an hour or two the shift manager would come around and say, "Why don't you give a few extra breaks?" [In those days we called them smoke breaks.] If you wanted to go home, you could, but if you didn't have a table, and you were scheduled extra, you might sit there all night. Didn't make any tips, of course, but they scheduled extra people just so that there would be plenty of help, and that's the only club that I can recall that did it that way. Usually, if you have too many people, you just send them home, and that's what Harrah's Club did a lot. If they had one too many dealers, they were out of there. You sent them home; you saved that dealer's wages. So that was another thing that in the short term probably cost Harolds Club lots of money in payroll, but in the long run it generated a tremendous loyalty to the club.

You said that some clubs made a pretense of being happy when a player won, but in Harolds Club they meant it?

That's right.

How did everybody know that Pappy or that Harold Smith or whoever really wanted people to win?

Mainly through their actions or their reactions. If you're in some casinos where a player is winning a lot of money—the dealer is losing—you can almost feel the tension. I've heard a lot of customers say this, "Oh, the pit boss is walking up and down the pit, and he's upset, and he's got an unhappy look on his face."

The shift manager might come down and hold a huddled conference in the pit. In Harolds Club none of this happened. If some player had out a lot of money, several thousands of dollars, the pit bosses wouldn't huddle together and talk about it. You never saw Harold Smith Sr. or Pappy or Harold Jr. or any of them come down to see what's going on, "Oh, somebody's got a lot of money out." You would see just the opposite. You'd see one of the Smith family talking to them and sincerely wishing them luck.

Hundreds of times I've seen a Smith or a shift manager go up to a customer and say, "You know, you're quite a bit ahead now. You should quit while you still have some money. Don't stay too long, or you're going to lose it all back."

In the late 1940s and early 1950s there were a couple of math students that formed teams that came out from colleges back East with a roulette system, and they got tens of thousands of dollars ahead. Pappy and Harold both kept telling these kids, "Quit while you still have some money." Both of the teams did eventually quit. I think one team left with about eighty thousand dollars, and the other one left with over one hundred thousand dollars, which was a lot of money in those days. Those particular instances both got mentioned in the *New York Times* and in *Life* magazine, and you just knew that the Smith family did not care. They knew that sooner or later you'd come back and play again, and when you did you would probably lose, and if you didn't lose, someone else would.

Why were the Smiths that comfortable losing money, and why did other people panic so much over it?

I think a lot of it comes from the fact that the Smith family knew that if you played long enough, you were going to lose. It's true of everyone. If you stay and play, you're eventually going to lose your money. As long as you aren't cheating or being dishonest or manipulating the cards or dice in any way, the longer you stay, the more apt you are to lose your money. The Smiths felt that if we keep them here, they'll stay and lose their money back.

But if you send a team of college kids home with eighty thousand dollars, it's never coming back.

It's never coming back, but you're getting at least eighty thousand dollars worth of free publicity all over the nation. Not only word of mouth, but you're getting the picture of the week in Life magazine, that has these kids in it with Pappy or Harold telling them, "You know, you're ahead, you should quit." You're getting articles in the New York Times. You're getting an article by a gentleman named Robert Bennyhoff, who was a very famous

columnist at that time. You're getting this newspaper coverage all over the Bay area. Like I say, as far back East as New York, people are reading about this.

It's just like a few years ago when card counting was so prevalent, and all those people discovered that, "Gee, we can count cards, and we can beat these places." All of a sudden the twenty-one game mushroomed into the most popular game in a casino, because people thought that they could beat it, and you know as well as I do that it takes a good card counter to beat the game. Your average card counter or your person that's just learning how to card count is not that good, but he thinks he can win.

It's the same way with Harolds Club and those roulette players. People would read that and say, "Those kids beat that game. We can beat that game," and "Let's go to Harolds Club because they encourage you to win. They don't try and run you out." They'd been run out of a couple of clubs before they got to Harolds Club, so if people think they can win, they're going to play more.

Would you describe the Smith family? Who were the people that were in the business, their names, their relationship to each other, and then their roles in the business?

In 1935 Harold Smith Sr. and his brother, Raymond A. Smith, came to Reno. They had operated carnival games and games of chance throughout the United States before they came to Reno. When they settled in Reno they opened a place on South Virginia Street. About six months later they talked their father, Raymond I. Smith, into coming to Harolds Club and becoming general manager. So Raymond I. Smith, who was called Pappy, came to Reno late in 1935 to help operate the club. Harold Smith had a son named Harold Smith Jr., who, if he were alive today, would be about sixty-five years of age. Harold Smith Jr. was very active in the operation in later years. Raymond A. Smith did not come into the club that much in later years. When the club first opened, Raymond A. would come in and deal and help out in any way possible, but in later years he was more active in the financial end

of the business. When the club first opened, Harold Smith Sr. and Raymond A. owned the club in its entirety. In the 1940s Raymond I. Smith became a part owner of the club.

Harold Smith's first wife's name was Dorothy McPherson Smith. She worked there as a dealer, and when Harold Smith divorced her in 1947, she got 25 percent of the club. Harold then married a girl named Lois Morris. Lois had a son named David. David Smith worked in the club for awhile as a dealer and a floor man. Pappy Smith's first wife's name was Dora, but he divorced her, and he married a lady named Iola in about 1942. They had three children. They had twins named George and Betty and a daughter, Twyla. They were half brother and half sisters to Harold Sr. and Raymond A. Smith.

Of the wives, was Dorothy the only one to take an active role in the business?

Well, Iola did to a degree. Iola was dealing roulette when Pappy met her. Harold's mother, Pappy's first wife, is supposed to have worked in the club, too, but that was way before my time. That was in the 1930s. The Smiths that were actively involved in the club were Pappy (Raymond I.), Raymond A., Harold Sr., and Harold Jr. George became involved in the last few years the Smiths owned the club.

A lot of people get confused between Raymond I. and Raymond A. Raymond I. was the dad, and his two older sons were Harold Smith Sr. and Raymond A. Smith. Raymond I. was always the general manager. Harold was more involved in the actual gaming end of business. To the best of my knowledge Pappy Smith never dealt at all, but Harold and Raymond A. both did. Raymond A. was on the floor in the earlier days, but by the 1950s he was pretty much off the casino floor, and he went into the financial end of the business. Harold Jr. eventually got into the pit quite a bit. In the late 1950s and the 1960s Harold Jr. was running the casino. He was the casino manager.

Who decided what slot machines to put in and where to put them?

I think Harold Sr. had the most to say about that, but I really couldn't give you a definite answer. At one point Jim Hunter was involved with the slot machines a lot. Jim Hunter was the first person outside of the Smith family that had any upper-echelon, managerial duties in Harolds Club.

He went to work in Harolds Club, I would say, about 1938 or 1939. Harold Sr. had a drinking problem, and he would sometimes be drunk or be in the hospital or drying out and be gone for months or weeks at a time. During those times Jim Hunter would step in to help operate the casino. Pappy always was in charge, but, of course, he couldn't be there twenty-four hours a day. So when Harold Sr. wasn't around, Jim Hunter wound up being in charge, under Pappy.

We've been talking about the Smith family, and now, if you could, I'd like you to describe the personalities of each of the individual people.

I'll start with Pappy, because he's the oldest. Raymond I. was very visible in the club, but mainly during the daytime hours. I didn't work that many day shift hours, so I didn't see him that much, but what I remember about Pappy was that he would wear white shirts and very seldom had a coat on. He would have on a bolo tie or a Harolds Club tie. His big promotion was doubling the bets for the customers. He'd go behind the table and tell the dealer, "When they win this time, pay them double." If he was in a hurry he would do it just the one time, and if they lost, they lost. That was too bad. But sometimes when he felt generous, he would take the deck away from the dealer, and he'd say, "Let me deal. Let me deal the poor bastards a hand." When he said that, the people that knew what was coming would put out as much money as they could, and Pappy would deal everybody two cards, and then he'd deal himself two cards, and he'd turn his cards over and just hit whatever he had until he busted. If he had fifteen, he'd hit. If he had nineteen, he'd hit, and he would just pay everybody on the table and say to the dealer, "I feel sorry for those poor bastards." [laughter] He would do that a lot, and people would try and follow him from table to table, because they knew he was

going to double the bets or deal a “poor bastards” hand. Sometimes that sly old guy would go behind the table, and everybody would put those big bets out figuring they were going to get paid double, and after the dealer had dealt out the cards he would say, “Well, maybe we’ll pay them double next time.” [laughter] And then he’d turn around and walk away, and these people were left sitting there with their mouths open.

He was a great believer in Dale Carnegie’s book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. In fact, when you were hired at Harolds Club you were given that book. In the break room he made available a drink made of brown sugar and vinegar. This was supposed to be the most healthful drink in the world, so he encouraged everyone to drink that mixture of brown sugar and vinegar.

He also believed in word association to remember people’s names. If you were from Tacoma, Washington, he would remember “comb” so he would see you, and he’d say, “Oh, you’re from Tacoma, Washington.” One time a girl named Barbara Maxwell and I were dealing a dice table, and he came behind the table preliminary to doubling the bets. He asked us our names and then he said, “Ladies and gentlemen, I’d like you to meet Dwayne Kling and Barbara Maxwell,” and then he’d go into his little spiel. So when he left this one time he said to me, “Well, I’ll remember your name next time I come in, because I’ll associate Kling with peaches.” And to Barbara he said, “I’ll remember your name, because I’ll associate Maxwell with coffee.” So the next time he comes behind our table he introduces us as Dwayne Bartlett and Barbara Sanborn (for Bartlett pears and Chase and Sanborn coffee)! [laughter] Still, when I see people I haven’t seen for years, they’ll call me Dwayne Bartlett as a joke.

A big thing about the Smith family, all of them—we’re talking about descriptions of the three of them, but this one encompasses all of them—they were all very visible in the club. They were very, very visible. They would come up and talk to customers, and you could hear the customers talking to their friend later, and they’d say, “Well, that’s Pappy Smith, he owns this place. That’s Harold Smith, he runs this place.” It made the customers feel so important because *the* owner, or one of the owners, was coming

up and talking to them. I've always felt that was a very important part of the business. I have never seen a club where owners were as visible as the Smith family was.

Harold Sr. was more visible in the evening hours. He was more of a partier, and he liked to drink and liked to gamble. He was very loquacious. He'd get on the microphone and advertise what was going on in the seventh floor Fun Room. He'd advertise what was being served as a special that night in the restaurant. You couldn't help but see or hear Harold Sr. when he was in the club—a very outgoing kind of a person. Pappy was outgoing, too, but in a quieter way. Everybody had a tremendous amount of respect for Pappy, and for Harold Sr., too. They were always very fair to their employees. They did whatever they could to make it an enjoyable place to work.

Harold Jr. was more of a cocky and aggressive kind of a person. He did have the ability to irritate a lot of people, but as he grew older he mellowed out, and he became easy to work with. He was also an outgoing person, very flashy, very flamboyant, a classy dresser, loved to gamble, loved to drink, and loved women. That's another thing they all had in common—they all had more than one wife, and they all had more than one girlfriend. But they were a fun-loving family, and I'm sure a lot of times their love of fun and gambling and drinking and girls got them in trouble and took them away from business. They would have probably had a more efficiently run operation if they paid a little bit more attention to business than they did.

Harold Sr. wrote a book, I Want to Quit Winners, and in it he talks about his philosophy of running a casino. He talks a lot about women and why he used them. Would you comment on that?

I think that Harolds Club did a very important thing when they brought women into dealing. It started out in the late 1930s when Dorothy Smith, Harold Sr.'s wife and Harold Jr.'s mother, saw how hard and long the Smith boys were working, and she learned how to deal so she could come in and give breaks. This gradually worked into teaching other females to learn how to deal,

and I don't really know if this was Pappy's idea or Harold's idea, but they really took gambling out of the darkness and from behind closed doors and put it out into the public and made it a family type of entertainment, and they needed the women to do that.

There weren't very many women that played any of the gambling games in the 1930s and 1940s, until the Smith family started bringing in lady dealers. Women would come in and play with a lady dealer, because they felt more comfortable. They did away with the image of the old gambler with the eye shade and the dark glasses and the single light down on the table. They had a lady dealing that twenty-one game, who, when she got off work she would go home and take care of her family, or she might go to a PTA meeting, and she might teach Sunday school on Sunday, and she was just a plain, average, homebody type of person. The women that would come in and play with them would realize that. So that was one thing it did—it got more ladies in the club playing. Another thing it did was bring in a lot of sharpies or crossroaders that thought they could come in and cheat these lady dealers, because they figured a lady dealer wasn't very smart. Of course, in the long run, most cheaters wind up losing their money, too. The third thing it did—it caused men to come in and sit down to play with them and visit with these ladies and strike up conversations, and that increased the volume of play in the casino.

I may have mentioned earlier that the Smith family didn't allow the dice tables to be called crap tables; they were always called dice tables. What Harolds Club tried to do on the dice table was to have one woman and one man on the dice table, feeling that a woman would be much less intimidated to come up to a dice table, if there was a lady dealer there that they could talk to. So a scheduling situation that we always tried to work with was to have at least one woman on a dice table. I think that had a lot to do with building up the dice play in Harolds Club at that time.

Harold also talks about cocktail waitresses and the right way to serve a man, the right way to serve a woman, the right way to serve a couple. Mainly it wasn't sexist in the way that we think about it now, exploiting sex, but recognizing gender and doing the correct thing. Do you recall that?

The cocktail waitresses, up until the last few years, wore a Western outfit the same as the dealers. The cocktail waitresses weren't showing a lot of skin, as they do nowadays. I just remember them coming up to the table, and they always said, "The Smith family would like to buy you a drink." Also, they were never called cocktail waitresses; they were called hostesses.

Would you describe the property, what it looked like, what the amenities were, how many table games, how many slot machines, how many keno games?

I don't think I can answer all those questions. I don't really recall how many slot machines we had there then. We had around forty table games on the first floor, and on the second floor we probably had about twenty-five table games. On the third floor was the restaurant, and on the seventh floor we had one dice table, one roulette table, and three or four twenty-one tables.

I first started there in 1954, and the last year I worked there was 1970. So during that time frame in gaming the twenty-one game became much more popular, and the crap tables lost a lot of their popularity. At one time there were fifteen crap tables in Harolds Club. I would say that when Harolds Club was sold to Summa Corporation, I doubt if there were more than eight dice tables. So the popularity of the dice table went down as the twenty-ones went up, and there's a lot of reasons offered for that, but, basically, I think it's because a customer has to have a lot more money to start shooting craps than he does when he starts playing twenty-one. A twenty-dollar bill can go a long way on a twenty-one table, but on a dice table a twenty-dollar bill barely gets you started.

The keno game in Harolds Club had their main keno counter on the first floor. It was almost in the center of the entire casino, and it took up a great deal of prime area. Ironically, the keno game was a leased-out concession. The Smith family did not own the keno game. Originally, the keno game was opened by a gentleman named Fred Beck. When he died in 1954, his widow, a lady named Jessie Beck, who later owned the Riverside Hotel, took over. She paid a certain amount of rent to Harolds, and I don't think

anybody except Jessie and a very few other people knew how much money she was paying to lease that space, but when the Hughes Corporation took over Harolds Club, they broke her lease and kicked her out of Harolds Club. Then a short time later she bought and reopened the Riverside Hotel. Harolds had a couple of keno outstations on the second floor, and they had quite a few keno runners in those days, many more than you see nowadays.

Slot machines, I don't know. We probably had at least five hundred slot machines. There were quite a few dollar machines on the second floor. The first floor was mainly nickels, dimes, and quarters, but the second floor was heavy on dollar slot machines. There were no slot machines on the seventh floor.

There was only one restaurant, and it was on the third floor. In later years they opened a prime rib room on the seventh floor. When I was there the second time, they always had entertainment on the seventh floor. It was a small room, but they had a lot of stars that were on their way up, or some stars that were on their way down. Harry James played in the Fun Room on the seventh floor, as did Louie Armstrong, Petula Clark, Trini Lopez, people of that caliber. So there was good entertainment on the seventh floor. The Fun Room would seat, maybe, between eighty and a hundred people. Harrah's Headliner Room would hold between four and five hundred, and the South Shore Room at Lake Tahoe could hold one thousand people on a cocktail show. So there was a huge difference between the two clubs.

We had two bars on the first floor, three on the second floor, and one on the seventh floor. On the second floor one of the bars was called the Silver Dollar Bar, and that was famous for years. That was one of Harold's big advertising features. There were almost three thousand silver dollars embedded in clear plastic on the bar. They say, on occasion, that people would get desperate and try to chip a few of those silver dollars out of that plastic. [laughter] Later on they expanded the Silver Dollar Bar and called it the Silver Dollar Lounge. They featured stage entertainment there, a lot of local groups. People like Cork Proctor played there for many years. There was a group called the Winners that played there, and Sonny King played there a lot. It was a very small lounge and a very small stage. I doubt if there was room for forty

people in that Silver Dollar Lounge, but it was a real popular local hangout, and it was a popular hangout for employees on their nights off, and it was a hangout for Harold Sr. and Harold Jr.

Harolds had probably the greatest gun collection that was ever assembled. The gun collection was located in a room on the second floor called the Roaring Camp Room. The name for the Roaring Camp Room came from a club that was located on Lake Street called the Roaring Camp. It was owned by a gentleman named Raymond Stagg, and Mr. Stagg had collected Western memorabilia over a period of many, many years. He had things such as pistols that Tom Mix, the Western movie star, had used; pistols that Jesse James had used; and many different types of Western guns. Pappy Smith bought the Roaring Camp from Raymond Stagg and moved the entire collection to Harolds Club in 1950.

Raymond Stagg was always dressed like a Western frontiersman. He had leather jackets with buckskin fringe on them, wore a big cowboy hat, had a long white beard and goatee, and looked kind of like Buffalo Bill Cody. When Pappy Smith bought the collection from Stagg, he hired Stagg to tour the United States in a covered wagon advertising Harolds Club with one of those big "Harolds Club or Bust" slogans on both sides of the covered wagon.

Pappy Smith used the gun collection to advertise Harolds Club. During the early morning hours in summertime, from around the first of June until the first of September, he would block off all the gaming area in the Roaring Camp Room to allow young children to come up in that area and look at all the different memorabilia that was there. It wasn't only firearms. It was bows and arrows and Indian artifacts and different types of wagons and surreys and buggies. The entire huge room was full of Western memorabilia; it was like a museum. It stayed with Harolds Club until it was auctioned off in 1994. It was another advertising gimmick. It ties in with the fact that you couldn't advertise gambling, but you could advertise your gun collection. So it was another reason to come to Harolds Club. Without even mentioning the word gambling, you drew in tens of thousands of people that would come in to look at your gun collection. Of

course, everybody's theory in those days was that if you got somebody in the club, sooner or later most of them would gamble.

Harolds Club didn't have a hotel, but they had two motels. They had one on the corner of Moana and South Virginia, and they also had one where the "y" is in Sparks. It's on Prater Way near Fourth Street. The motel is still there. Both locations were called the Pony Express Motel. They had shuttle buses that would shuttle customers back and forth between the motels and the club. They also had a big motel giveaway program. When you checked into just about any motel you would get a coupon that you could bring to Harolds Club and turn in for things, such as a small roll of nickels, a free drink, or a discount on your food. So they utilized not only the two motels that they owned, but they also utilized all the motels in town through their giveaway coupons. Eventually, I think, just about every club in Reno used the same type of program, but Harolds Club was the one that started it.

They also had a gun club out on the Pyramid Lake Highway, and it was used for trap shooting and skeet shooting, but mostly trap shooting. There were discount rates given to any of the employees that wanted to go out there and shoot, and there were discounts given to employees who bought shotgun shells there. They utilized it in their advertising, and they also opened gambling there. There would be about four or five shoots held at the Harolds Club Gun Club that would attract thousands of gamblers over a period of time. Not everybody that shot was a gambler, but Harolds Club would open up gambling there during those shoots. At some of the largest shoots there would be as many as six or eight twenty-one games, two dice games, and a roulette table, plus, maybe, fifty or sixty slot machines. They would open up only during those shoots. To be asked to work at the gun club as a dealer or pit boss was quite a compliment, because you had to be completely trusted as far as honesty and loyalty was concerned. You had to have a great personality, and only the tip-top dealers and supervisors were asked to go out there. It was a different situation, because you would open the games at about seven o'clock in the morning, and you stayed there until all those games were closed. On an average day you would

work about sixteen hours a day, and on a long day, there's been occasions where the gambling went on for twenty-four hours. Employees would go home and shower and change clothes and come right back out again with only a couple hours of sleep. I worked out there once as a dealer, and I worked out there several times as the gaming supervisor. On the big shoots we'd have two floor men work there, but on some of the smaller shoots there would just be one person there. I saw probably the biggest action that I saw anywhere in my life at some of those shoots. In those days you could bet seven hands on a twenty-one game, and we would have people that would bet one thousand dollars on all seven hands. We'd also let them bet one thousand dollars on the crap table. We handled a lot of money out there.

We've been talking about some of the key elements of Harolds Club, and I'd like you to comment on how important you think each one of them was to Harolds. The first one is employee stability and loyalty.

As far as I'm concerned, they were two of the main reasons for Harolds Club's success.

And was it accidental, or was it smart?

I think it was planned by the Smith family. They were basically nice people, and they were good people to work for. They saw the value of keeping long-term employees there, and I think they worked on keeping them there.

That's interesting. Harold Sr. and Harold Jr. certainly didn't have a reputation as always being nice when they were out playing.

No, but I think a lot of that was because drinking altered their behavior. [laughter]

But you think that one of the keys to their success was that they were nice people, and they did nice things?

I think so. If you're nice to people, people are nice to you, and it generates loyalty, and, to me, if you keep coming into a business, and you see the same employees there, you feel good seeing them. I always think, "Gee, it must be a good place to work if these same people stay here year after year." So, as a customer, you feel more comfortable to see the same people there. There again, the recognition factor enters in. If the same employee is there year after year, he's going to recognize you as a customer when you come in, and you are going to return to that business because of that employee.

What other gimmicks were employed at Harolds Club?

Well, I guess it depends on what you call a gimmick. I mean, is a billboard a gimmick? Is an advertising program a gimmick? Is a four-year scholarship a gimmick?

They awarded one scholarship every year to the larger high schools in Nevada, and the smaller schools were awarded a scholarship every other year. A lot of famous people were awarded those scholarships and were given an opportunity to attend college. Some perhaps would have never had the opportunity. Rollan Melton from the *Reno Gazette-Journal* and Roger Trounday, a long-time casino gaming executive still with John Ascuaga's Nugget, are two persons that were awarded Harolds Club scholarships. So was that a gimmick? It put the name out in the public eye.

Was it a gimmick when Pappy doubled the bets, or when everyone wore Western wear? How about the "Harolds Club or Bust" slogan? I don't know if those are gimmicks, or if they were all part of an overall program to create an image. They sponsored the fireworks for years in Reno. I don't know when they started, and I don't know what year they stopped, but Harolds Club put on the fireworks at Mackay Stadium for years. They donated tens of thousands of dollars to just about any charitable organization you can think of, St. Mary's Hospital, in particular. Pappy Smith was the main motivator to get a four-lane highway from Sacramento and San Francisco all the way to Reno. If it hadn't been for lobbying and the pressure that he put on Congress, the four-lane

highway over Donner Summit would have opened many years later than it did. They had newspaper ads that didn't pertain to gambling at all. They paid for *Pioneer Nevada* stories, which was a book about Nevada ghost towns, gaming in the early days, Nevada history, Nevada characters, and Nevada personalities.

Another gimmick, if you want to call it that, was the book that Harold Smith Sr. wrote called *I Want to Quit Winners*. I think we discussed that a little bit earlier, but that was a huge advertising gimmick. Thousands of those books were given away. They sold a few of them, but not too many. Tens of thousands of those books are out there that have been autographed by Harold Sr. I have two of them in my house myself. [laughter] So that was a gimmick to a degree. I think the doubling of the bets really generated a lot of publicity, and the Smiths' physical appearance in the club was important. Someone saying, "I saw one of the Smiths; I talked to one of the Smiths," made people feel important. I've seen hundreds or thousands of customers come back and say, "Oh, yes, how you doing Pappy? Remember, I met you last week," or "Remember, Harold, I saw you last time I was in town." So that was a gimmick, too.

They also brought several opera stars to Reno for public appearances at the Manogue High School auditorium. Lily Pons, the famous opera singer, appeared here, as did Jan Peerce, Ruggiero Ricci, Elizabeth Schwartzkopf, and others.

In his book Harold Sr. says that he'd studied the violin as a child, and he'd always loved classical music, and so it was a passion of his to bring it to Reno. Was that passion obvious in any way in the club?

No. I would have never been aware of that if I hadn't read it in the book. However, there's a famous story that when the Golden Hotel burned, he stood on the roof of Harolds Club and fiddled while the Golden burned.

What about advertising?

They were noted for their advertising. There was a time frame in the 1940s and 1950s when they spent more money on

advertising than the combined expenditures of every casino in the state of Nevada. The billboard campaign was probably the biggest billboard campaign ever initiated in the United States. Harolds Club signs all featured the motto or slogan "Harolds Club or Bust." They were located in forty-eight of the fifty states. Ironically, the two states that were missing were Vermont and New Hampshire, and Vermont was where the Pappy Smith family came from. All the billboards featured that same slogan, but they had different cartoon characters on them. They usually had two people dressed in pioneer outfits or two mountain men dressed in leather buckskins. They might be two guys paddling a canoe down a river, or there might be two guys hanging onto the tail of a bear, and the bear was running away, and they were saying "Harolds Club or Bust." They might be two characters on a handcar propelling themselves down the railroad tracks saying, "Harolds Club or Bust." It was said that you were never more than four hours away from a Harolds Club billboard, no matter where you were in the United States. Eventually, there were more than twenty-three hundred billboards scattered around the world, and every billboard had the uniqueness of saying how many miles away you were from Harolds Club. A lot of the military units picked them up, and there were billboards that were located in places like China, Vietnam, Korea, and the North Pole. I think there may have been one on the South Pole, too. But military men took them all over the world, and you would see pictures of billboards saying "Harolds Club. 4,893 Miles Away."

The club's advertising program all stemmed from the Thomas C. Wilson advertising agency. The Wilson agency was involved in the historical books that they published and they were the writers of the newspaper ads that appeared in the paper almost every day, and, as I mentioned, they were the agency that was responsible for the billboards throughout the United States. There were so many billboards spread throughout the United States that Harolds Club had a permanent crew of people that traveled all over the United States keeping them up to date and seeing that they were properly maintained.

Was there anything unique about their newspaper advertising?

Advertising gaming wasn't legal in those days. You couldn't say, "We have the loosest slots in town," or "We have twenty-one tables," or "We have friendly dealers," so what Harolds Club did was to put stories in the papers about pioneer days, say like in the 1860s or 1870s. They would have stories about ghost towns and mining camps. They would have a story about say Bodie, California, or Virginia City, Nevada, and they were carrying on the idea of Nevada and Western frontier days. That, of course, tied in with their Western dress code and Western atmosphere. So they would have these articles in the paper about the Western days, and down at the bottom it would just say "Sponsored by Harolds Club" or "Advertisement paid for by Harolds Club." This, of course, was legal, because you did not mention gaming in any form. You were just printing this information about Nevada or the West and putting your name, Harolds Club, underneath it.

They always had an entry in every parade. The big parade, of course, was the rodeo parade. In those days it was on the Fourth of July, and later it was moved into June. Harolds Club always had a float or two in the rodeo parade and in the Carson City Nevada Day Parade. They also always entered a rose float in the Portland Rose Parade. Portland, Oregon, is famous as the City of Roses, and Harolds Club always had a float there, and quite often Harolds Club had a float in the Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena, California.

You've talked about entertainment as a part of the policy of the club. Was it just mimicking what Harrah's had done in developing entertainment, or did they think about it differently?

I don't think they were mimicking. They knew entertainment brought people into the club, and they did the best they could with the physical facilities that they had. They would've had a larger entertainment program, I'm sure, if they would have had more room in the seventh floor or in the Silver Dollar Lounge, but they brought in pretty good entertainment, when you consider the facilities that they had.

I would like to ask you about the non-Smith managers. Could you tell us more about them?

Really, the only two assistant general managers or casino managers outside the Smith family were Jim Hunter, who started work there in 1939 and stayed there until the club was sold, and Dan Orlich. Dan went to work there in 1952 and stayed there until 1971. The Smiths, themselves, were actually the general managers and the casino managers, but if they did delegate authority, they delegated it in the early years to Jim Hunter and in the later years to Dan Orlich.

Under the general manager and/or the casino manager there were shift managers. The shift manager was more in charge of the gaming than in charge of the entire operation. When I first went to work at Harolds Club in 1954 the slot manager was a fellow named George Novack. The three shift managers were Chuck Webster, Jack Shaver, and Frank Chase, whose father owned the building that Harolds Club was in at that time, the Chase Building. Over a period of years the shift managers would change, but Chuck Webster stayed there as shift manager until the club was sold. Dan Orlich worked as a shift manager for quite awhile prior to becoming casino manager. Some of the other shift managers were Darl Voss and Don McDonnell. Most of those people worked for Harolds Club anywhere from twenty to thirty years. A lot of them came to work right after World War II. George Novack was slot manager for quite awhile, and I believe Earl Carpenter was slot manager when the club was sold to the Hughes Corporation. In the early days Guy Lent was in charge of the financial arrangements. Another fellow named Eddie Thomas worked in payroll and accounting for many, many years. In later years Bob Klaich was the comptroller. Bob was comptroller when Harolds Club was sold to the Hughes Corporation.

Pappy allowed Harold to put bars in the club in 1941, and there were eventually seven bars in the club. Leo Schwarz was the first bar manager, and Wayne Salabacka was bar manager for a long time. In later years Russ Nerase and Gene Doty were bar managers.

There was never any long-time food manager that I recall. The restaurant didn't open until 1955. In the early days of casino gaming none of the places had restaurants. The Nevada Club was the first club to put a restaurant inside their building. One of the

reasons Mr. Fitzgerald put in a restaurant was because he didn't want any of his employees to leave the building during their eight-hour work schedule. There used to be little coffee shops and little cafes scattered around Douglas Alley and Commercial Row, and on Virginia Street, right across from Harolds Club, there was Tiny's Waffle Shop and also the Monarch Cafe. On Second Street there was the Wigwam coffee shop and also the Grand Cafe. So it wasn't until the 1950s that casinos opened restaurants.

Who was the competition for Harolds Club?

In the early days the competition was the Bank Club and the Palace Club. In the 1950s Harrah's Club was really their only competition.

When did you first hear that Harolds Club might be selling, and how did you hear it?

I would say early in 1970, and I really don't remember where I first heard it. Rumors go around any business, and, of course, they go around casinos as much, if not more, than anywhere else. Pappy Smith, of course, had died in 1967, and Senior had made the statement that he couldn't run the club without his Pappy. Harold Jr., of course, wanted to keep the club and run the club. There were rumors of cash shortages. There were rumors that Harold Smith Sr. was gambling a lot and owed a lot of money and that he needed some cash.

I know that the Del Webb Corporation looked at buying Harolds Club. A friend of mine, a fellow named Angel Naves, told me that they had several meetings with the Smith family regarding the purchase of Harolds Club. Angel was with the Del Webb Corporation at that time, and of course, they later bought the Primadonna. Angel told me that they were very close to buying Harolds Club. He was involved in the meetings, and he felt the reason the deal didn't go through was that they offered Harolds Club ten million dollars worth of Del Webb stock, and the Smith family wasn't interested in stock; they were interested in cash. His story is that Del Webb and Howard Hughes used to hang

out together down in Las Vegas, and they'd sit around and talk about different things, and Del Webb made the mistake of mentioning to Howard Hughes that he was negotiating to buy Harolds Club. When Howard Hughes heard that, then he got involved and sent his people up to Reno to negotiate with the Smith family, and Howard Hughes offered the Smith family ten million dollars in cash. So according to Angel the offer from both people was the same, only one was in stock, and one was cash. The Smiths needed and wanted cash more than they did stock. The Del Webb Corporation, at that time, was paying very little, if any, dividends, so there was no cash flow from their stock. Ironically, the Del Webb stock doubled in less than a year. [laughter] So they could have kept the stock and sold off half of it and had all the cash that they needed.

How did you hear that it was sold?

I don't remember the specific announcement. There was talk, like I say, for several weeks that the club was going to be sold, and I don't recall if Harold Jr. came and told us, or if it came out in a memo, or what. I don't remember. I know we eagerly looked forward to a "well-managed operation" being put in place, figuring again that the Las Vegas operators were more knowledgeable than the Reno operators.

That's interesting. When you first told me that, I could understand that, but now that I've listened to much more about how personal a job it was, how much you enjoyed it, wasn't there any anxiety that the Harolds Club you liked wasn't going to be there?

We didn't realize that we were going to lose all the things that we took for granted at that time. I think the answer is that you have a tendency to take things for granted, and until something is taken away from you, you don't miss it.

My last question is to ask you to summarize what you think was Harolds's biggest contribution to the gaming industry.

I think the biggest contribution that Harolds Club made to the industry was that they brought gambling out in the open, and they made it acceptable to the average person. It was difficult to get it accepted by the public, but they continually worked on it. They contributed to the community in many ways, and that helped to make gaming acceptable. They brought women into dealing, which helped make it acceptable to the average person. They showed that gambling didn't have to be operated by what you might call sleazy characters or underworld characters; it could be operated and run by your average person. Average people worked there. They put a whole new spin on the gaming industry, as far as the public acceptance of it, and the way that gambling was presented to the public.

They were continually improving the image of gaming. And as Harrah's Club grew, Harrah's Club was also improving the image of, not only Harrah's, but also gambling in the entire Reno area. So the two giants at that time, Harolds and Harrah's, were both striving to improve gambling's image.

We were talking about the sale. And the question is did it have to be sold?

Part of it was because its time was over. One of the reasons its time was over was because when Pappy died in 1967, there really wasn't that much leadership. Harold Sr. made the remark that he couldn't run the club without Pappy, and Harold Jr.—it's a question of whether he could have run it or not. It is possible he could have run it and done a good job, but throughout the years his family—his dad and his granddad—had never *really* let him run it, and the few times they had let him run it, they had taken it away from him at one time or another. The whole history of Harolds Club might have been different if Senior would have just given it to Junior and backed off and let him run it the way he wanted.

One of the big differences between Harolds and Harrah's, I think, is that Harrah's always had management teams, management training, and management seminars, and as the club was expanding, their managers were expanding. The Smith family

never had anyone that they really put in charge. They had Dan Orlich and Jim Hunter that they used to a degree, but they were always quite a bit under the Smith family thumb. So the Harolds Club's time had come, and I feel it was because there was no leadership after Pappy died.

Note

1. The Holiday Hotel was still in existence at the time of the interview, but it closed in the late fall of 1998.

SILVER SPUR: RISE TO GENERAL MANAGER AND CO-OWNER

W*HEN DID you leave Harolds Club?*

I left Harolds Club in February of 1971, went to work right across the street, 221 North Virginia, at the Silver Spur casino. I started there as the graveyard shift manager. In the Silver Spur a shift manager was basically just in control of the pit. You were there to help with other emergencies if something came up, but you didn't really have anything to do with the operation of any of the other departments. I was graveyard shift manager, and I was the only pit supervisor on the shift.

We had six twenty-one games, a crap, and a wheel, in the pit at that time. I worked the graveyard shift for a year. A fellow named Norm Brown, who was a friend and former coworker of mine at Harolds Club, was working at the Silver Spur as casino manager, so he was the person who hired me to run the graveyard shift. Norm had also hired several ex-Harolds Club dealers. I think I mentioned earlier that when the Hughes Corporation came in, they fired the wives of the pit supervisors. So Norm Brown thought that he would pick up some of Harolds Club's customers

if he hired some of those ex-Harolds Club dealers. It worked to a degree, as we brought a few customers over there. Also, there were three floor men there—myself, a fellow named Joe Devers, and Norm Brown, who had worked in Harolds Club. I started there in February of 1971, and in May of 1971 Norm Brown got fired as a casino manager by the co-owner and general manager of the Silver Spur, Reggie Parker. Reggie and Norm Brown didn't see eye to eye on several things, and one of the things related to unions. Reggie thought that Norm Brown was trying to bring a union into the Silver Spur. I never felt that Norm was, but for some reason or other, Reggie did. One thing led to another, and so Reggie terminated Norm in May of 1971 and put a gentleman by the name of Harry Bay in as casino manager, and I continued to work on graveyard.

A little over a year later, one Saturday night about 9:30 at night, I was home asleep when the phone rings, and it's Reggie Parker, and he said, "I want you to come down here right away." So I got dressed and went down to the Spur, and come to find out, Reggie had fired Harry Bay in the middle of the shift. That happened in July of 1972. He terminated Harry Bay as casino manager and appointed me casino manager and swing shift manager. So I was basically running the gaming in the Silver Spur as of July 1972. He fired Harry Bay, because he thought Harry was just goofing off. He wasn't paying attention. He wasn't in the pit when he was supposed to be in the pit, and he was out and about doing things that weren't Silver Spur business.

Didn't you worry that Reggie would think something about you? If Norm must be involved in union, didn't you worry he'd think you were, too, and fire you?

When Reggie fired Norman Brown for suspected union activity, Norm Brown called me and said, "Well, I got fired," and he said, "You're going to be next."

I was kind of worried that I would get fired, because, naturally, Norm had hired me, and I was a "Norm Brown guy." So when Norm told me that, I said, "Well, he's probably right. I probably will get fired." So I did something—and I didn't realize the

importance of it at the time. When I got off work, I went down to Reggie's office, and I said, "You know, I've heard that you're thinking about firing me, because I was a Norm Brown guy, and that I'm a union person." I said, "I have never cared for unions in my life. I don't like unions at all, never have, and never will." I said, "I tell you what I'll do." I said, "I would like to go down to the police station or wherever. We'll hire a polygraph person, and I will take a polygraph test stating that I have no affiliation with a union; I have no association with them; and I don't want to have anything to do with unions." I didn't know it at the time but Reggie was a firm believer in polygraphs, and he detested unions. When I made the statement that I did, I went way up on Reggie's list.

Also, when I ran that graveyard shift we had some terrific shifts. I worked graveyard for over a year, and we held about 27 percent in the pit during that entire time. I could do nothing wrong; everything I did worked good. We won a lot of money; we had a lot of volume. We had months where we won more money than the swing shift. We had one month where we won more money than the swing and the day shift put together. I developed a loyal crew, a loyal following, and we worked hard, had a good payroll. I saved a lot of money, and I won a lot of money.

Do you have a theory that the graveyard traditionally holds a better percentage than swing?

Oh, definitely, yes.

Do you have a theory for why that happens?

Well, my theory is that when the graveyard comes to work, the people there playing are usually winners and quite often drunk. They're drunk enough where they don't go home, and they are money ahead, so when they stay and play, the longer they play the more chance they stand to lose. Of course, this is everybody's theory. So you stay there on that table, and the graveyard wins the money back from you, so that's how you improve your percentage. You have very little drop, but a good win.

How much did you get paid as casino manager?

I think I got a five-dollar-a-day raise. I was probably making fifty or fifty-five dollars a day.

Earlier, you mentioned that you saved the payroll. How did you do that?

Lots of times, when we'd come into work on graveyard, we had just enough dealers to keep all the tables open, but no dealers to give breaks. So I asked the kids (the dealers), "Do you want me to get some overtime from swing shift, so you can have a break?"

They said, "No, we don't," because they would have to split the tokes with those people. By just my graveyard crew going in there, they kept all the tokes, and they didn't have to split them with anyone else. They said, "No, just let us go in there. We'll work without a break until tables go dead." I always thought that was impressive, because if I needed ten dealers, then ten dealers went in there, and they worked without a break. Sometimes they worked two, three hours without a break until the tables went dead. If the next day or two or three we had extra dealers, I would give them extra breaks or give them an hour off or something like that to make it up to them.

Also, if they were lucky and winning some money, I'd leave them in an hour or so longer. Then I would give them an hour or two overtime on their paychecks, so they got a little thank-you monetarily and a thank-you pat on the back to show that I appreciated them, because they cared enough to win some money for what I called *my* graveyard shift. It's a two-way street thing: if people are going to do something for you, you have to do something back for them. So I developed quite a loyal crew of dealers.

When Reggie offered me the casino manager's job, I'd been there about a year and a half. He was not the kind of guy to give out compliments, but he and I had developed a respect for each other. I think he knew what I was capable of doing; he knew where my loyalties lie; and he knew I was conscientious. So when he offered me the job, I was happy to take it, and I had no fears or no qualms

of doing a bad job. I knew I was capable of handling it. I knew what Reggie wanted, and I knew I could give it to him.

What did he say when he made you casino manager? What were his instructions?

There were no instructions. Reggie was very short on words. He didn't ask me if I wanted the job, he just said, "You're taking over—taking over tonight."

In the middle of the night?

In the middle of the night. He called me about 9:30, and it was probably 10:15 by the time I got down there, so I just took over the swing shift. The swing shift was one of Reggie's complaints about Harry Bay. It was just too easygoing; it was too lax. They were just kidding around and partying around and talking amongst themselves and not paying any attention to the games. The swing shift dealers were a younger crew, and I found out later that about three quarters of them thought I was going to come in there and fire them all. I had operated a strict shift or tight shift on graveyard, and they thought that I would do the same thing on swing and get rid of them all. I did run a tight ship on swing shift and a tight pit the whole time I was there, but I never had to terminate anybody. I just talked to them and explained to them how I wanted things done and what I wanted done. I wanted them to pay attention, I wanted them to be friendly to customers, I wanted them to get to work on time, keep their eyes on the game, and be alert to what was happening. I wound up getting along great with all of them, and swing shift started making money, and the whole pit kept on making money. It was a very successful operation.

I had often thought when I worked at Harolds Club that if I was ever in charge of a pit, I would try and set a happy medium between Harolds Club and Harrah's. I felt that Harrah's was too firm; they were too black and white. Rules were rules, and they had to be followed completely. Harolds Club was too lax. The very few rules that they had were really not followed that much, and it

was one of those things where someone said, "Well, that's OK. Don't worry about it." I thought that I wanted to run a place where you had rules, but rules that could be bent. If you had to use that rule, you could, but if you wanted to give an employee a break, or if you wanted to give a customer a break, you could. I was also a believer in losing the battle and winning the war. If a customer had a complaint, and even if I knew he was wrong, I would go ahead and pay him to make him feel important or make him feel good, because my feeling was if he, in his own mind, thought he was right, then he was right. If he thought he'd beat the dealer, or if he thought the dice should have been called a certain way, he wasn't usually trying to cheat you, he just really felt that way. So I let him win the battle. I would pay him, but I won the war, because he kept coming back, and eventually I won all his money from him.

I can remember standing in the swing shift pit one night with a fellow named Kent Buchanan. Kent was very upset, because this player would come in every week, regular as clockwork, and beat us. Not for a huge amount, but maybe a thousand, fifteen hundred dollars, five hundred dollars. He'd always come in and win. Kent just couldn't understand how I could just cater to this customer and be nice to him and smile and laugh with him, and Kent said, "You know, he beats us all the time. You know, we don't even want him in here."

I said, "His day will come. His day will come, and we'll start beating him." So, eventually, he started losing, and he lost back way more than he'd ever won in the Silver Spur. There were several instances like that. In any gambling casino, as long as you keep somebody playing there, they're going to eventually lose their money.

Did you learn that from the Smiths or from Harrah's? Where did you get that firm belief?

I think I got that firm belief quite a bit from Harolds Club, because I saw the same people coming into Harolds Club week after week after week. I'd seen it at Harrah's Club at Lake Tahoe, also, where the same people came in and played and played and

eventually lost their money. So part of it was from Harrah's, most of it was from Harolds Club, and the rest of it was just from being in the business so many years. You mellow out, and you mature a little bit, and you realize how much the house percentage is in your favor.

I always felt that gaming should be operated as a form of entertainment. You were there to please people, to make people happy. You were there to give them what they wanted. They were looking for fun, they were looking for excitement, they were looking to win, they were looking to have a good time. Most people come to Reno to have fun. Deep down inside they don't really expect to win any money. When they do win any money, it's a pleasant surprise to them, and it just brings them back sooner or brings them back more often. So if you can give somebody a good time in a gaming casino, they're going to eventually lose their money.

What was your job, and what did it entail? What were you responsible for, and when did you work? It sounds to me like you worked swing shift?

Yes, I was what was called a working casino manager. I was swing shift manager. I would work a day shift once in awhile. I never worked any more graveyard. I was tired of graveyard. I usually worked four swings and one day shift. I was responsible for all the hiring and all the firing in the pit. Other people could fire, but they didn't fire anybody until they went through me. As far as the scheduling of each shift, I would tell the shift managers on the other two shifts how many people to use and what shifts, such as a six to two shift or an eight to four shift. I would give them those figures, but I didn't do the individual dealer scheduling. However, I did schedule the pit bosses. There weren't that many pit bosses to schedule. On graveyard we had just one pit boss, except on weekends when we had two. On swing shift we had two pit bosses every night, and on day shift we had one pit boss and two on the weekends. Of course, I had relief pit bosses and relief shift managers for those days.

You had to replace yourself with a shift manager on graveyard. Who was your first promotion?

A fellow named Dan Becan. Dan was working at the Silver Spur when I came there. He, in fact, was there when the Silver Spur opened in 1967. Dan was dealing for me on graveyard, and I put him on the floor. He stayed with me until all the new clubs opened in 1978. Then he went to the Sahara Reno when it opened and stayed there for awhile before going to MGM, and, to the best of my knowledge, he's still working at MGM. He had worked in other clubs around town prior to coming to the Spur.

So that one was successful, the first shift manager that you had the authority to promote?

Yes, Dan did a good job for me.

You were responsible for the pit only?

The pit only, yes. I was responsible to a degree, like all floor men were, for checking a keno ticket payoff or for verifying a big jackpot or things of that nature. If somebody had a complaint in the restaurant, you would get involved in it. But basically as casino manager, my only true authority and true responsibility was in the pit. They had a slot manager, they had a keno manager, they had a restaurant manager, they had a bar manager.

Did you do a budget?

No. Budgets were never even thought of in those days. You just tried to win as much money you could and spend as little as you could. [laughter]

Did you get a profit and loss statement at the end of every month?

Yes, we had detailed profit and loss statements every month, but as casino manager, the only profit and loss I ever saw was the pit's.

Was the pit profitable?

The pit always made money, but I don't remember how much it made. I do recall the biggest year that the Silver Spur had. You have to remember this is an area that was thirty-three feet wide and one hundred forty feet deep, and we had two floors. We had seven twenty-one games, a crap and a wheel. We had a great keno game. We had a keno game on the first floor, and we had an outstation on the second floor. We had probably 250 slot machines at the most and a small coffee shop upstairs. In 1977 the club bottom lined \$972,000.00, which is a staggering amount of money to come out of a club that size.

Keno was a major contributor to the revenue. We had one of the best and fastest keno games in town. The keno manager for a long time was Jimmy Parker. He was Reggie Parker's son. We had a lot of people that came out of the Silver Spur keno that took over management jobs in other facilities that are still working to this day. A fellow named Ken Barrenchea is and has been manager of Fitzgerald's keno game for quite awhile. Prior to that Ken Barrenchea was the casino manager and assistant general manager of the Onslow. Don Trimble, who is in upper management at Ascuaga's Nugget, worked in our keno game. He was also general manager of the Onslow for awhile. Gordon Drendel, who is a shift manager at the Reno Nugget, was in our keno. Rod Jones, who is casino manager at the Flamingo Hilton, was my graveyard keno manager. Chuck Thomas was keno manager for the Silver Spur for many years, and Chuck is now the keno manager of the Excalibur Hotel-Casino in Las Vegas. So we had a lot of management people come out of the keno—more so than the pit.

That's staggering. How long were you casino manager?

I was casino manager from 1972 until 1979. When Reggie Parker retired and moved back to his home state of Arkansas, I was named general manager. I should mention that the Silver Spur was owned by a group of seven people. When it originally opened, Reggie Parker was hired as keno manager, and a fellow

named Fred Cavendish started out as general manager, but he didn't last too long. The theory at that time was that department managers were allowed to buy in as owners. Reggie Parker had five points in the club and was keno manager. Charlie Stepro had about four or five points, and he was the casino manager. Another fellow named Bill Hamilton was allowed to buy in a few points, and he was a shift manager. So they were hired for their expertise in their field, such as keno and pit, and they were allowed to buy in part of the club and run that department. Well, the first three years of the Silver Spur's existence, the club wasn't doing any good, wasn't making any money, mainly because they opened up with just one level of gaming. They soon came to the conclusion that they had to build a second floor, if they were going to have enough space to generate more revenue. To do that the owners had to come up with more money, and people like Fred Cavendish and Billy Hamilton didn't have enough money to contribute, so they sold out of the club. This left the Silver Spur with seven owners. One of them was Dr. Tom Mullis, who was the major owner. He was a local physician in town. The second largest owner was a gentleman named Conrad Priess, who also owned, or did own, part of the Onslow Hotel, part of the Crystal Bay Club, the Biltmore Hotel, and the Ponderosa Hotel. The next largest owner was Everett Brunzell, who was basically a contractor, but he was also part owner at one time or another of the Ponderosa, the Onslow, and the Crystal Bay Club. Another owner was José Gastanega. He and his family had owned the Eagle Thrifty stores before selling out to Raley's. Then, as I mentioned, there was Reggie Parker and Charles Stepro. The seventh owner was a fellow named John Gojack. John was a marketing person. He was married to a lady named Mary Gojack, who wound up being a state senator or state assembly person later on. John was active in the marketing and the promoting of the Silver Spur. So I was casino manager until 1979, and when Reggie retired, they offered me the opportunity to become general manager of the club.

About two years before that Tom Mullis went into partnership with a fellow named Jesse Hinkle, and they bought the Horseshoe Club. The Horseshoe was located right next door to the Silver Spur on the north side. It had been opened in 1956 by Bernie

Einstoss and a group of gamblers, and they had sold it to the Mason family in 1967. Then in 1977 the Masons sold it to Tom Mullis and Jess Hinkle. Tom Mullis owned 75 percent of the Horseshoe, and Hinkle the other 25 percent. In order to get the money to purchase the Horseshoe, Tom Mullis had taken out a bank loan and pledged his stock in the Silver Spur as collateral. Tom Mullis was the largest owner of the Silver Spur at that time. He owned more than 30 percent of the Silver Spur, and there was a lot of conflict between some of the owners of the Silver Spur. It was a sub-chapter S corporation with seven members at that time, and each man had only one vote, regardless of his percentage of ownership. Tom Mullis was on the small side of the voting clique, and he felt that he wasn't given enough chance to give his input into the Silver Spur, and he didn't feel that the Silver Spur was being run properly. So one of the reasons that he wanted to buy into the Horseshoe was so he could show the other owners "how a casino should be run."

He made a lot of changes and alterations and he had a lot of different ideas and projects in the Horseshoe. One of his major downfalls, I believe, was that he started remodeling the Horseshoe shortly after he bought it, and he remodeled it all during the summer months. In June, July, August, September there was remodeling going on, and that hurt his business a lot, and he never did really recover from that. In January of 1980, the Horseshoe was closed, Mullis and Hinkle went bankrupt, or couldn't meet their payments, and the Horseshoe was closed. It remained closed until April of 1981 when the Mason family took control of it again. In the meantime, when Mullis couldn't pay his bank loan, the bank took over Dr. Mullis's shares in the Silver Spur. Of course, they didn't want the shares; they just wanted to sell them and get rid of them. The Silver Spur owners had the right of first refusal to buy the Spur's stock back again. So the owners offered me the chance to buy 2 percent of the Silver Spur, and if I had to do it all over again, I would have tried to get enough money to buy at least 4 or 5 percent. But 2 percent was all I could financially handle—they cost twenty thousand a point. The rest of the owners bought the remaining amount of shares on a prorated basis. In other words, if you owned 10 percent of the Silver Spur, you could buy

10 percent of the available shares. So when that transaction was all done, Conrad Priess was the majority owner of the Silver Spur. He owned a little over 30 percent of it, and there still were seven owners, because, of course, Mullis was out as an owner, and then I was in as an owner. About the same time that the Silver Spur stocks were available, Reggie Parker, who had been general manager since 1968, retired and moved back to Arkansas, and I was offered the general manager job at the Silver Spur.

When I went to the gaming commission to get licensed, I was licensed as a general manager and as a co-owner at the same hearing. That was one of the proudest moments of my life. It definitely was. Looking back on it, when I think that I started out as a change person carrying change in Harolds Club in 1954 and then in 1980 wound up being a part owner of a casino, I was quite proud of that. It was something that I'd wanted to do for the last several years. It was another goal that I had set and a goal that I attained.

You have an interesting quote about luck being the residue of design, and it took you eight years to get your luck.

"Luck is the residue of design," to the best of my knowledge, was originally said by Branch Rickey, who was a general manager and owner of both the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball teams. I definitely believe luck is the residue of design. If you aren't prepared for things, if you don't design your life or design your standards or design your background of training or education, you aren't going to be offered a chance to get something. I firmly believe in that quote. I use it a lot. So many people say, "Oh, he was so lucky he got that. He was so lucky this happened. He was so lucky that he achieved a goal." Well, it isn't all luck. A lot of it is because you plan and work hard for it, and the luck is the residue that is the result of all your planning.

Did you think you were going to be able to become an owner in the Silver Spur? Did you think that that was a possibility?

Well, originally, I thought I would get the chance to be an owner in the Onslow Hotel-Casino, which was almost entirely

owned by people that already owned part of the Silver Spur. I knew they were going to build and open the Onslow, and I thought that I would get a chance to become a partner in it, but I never was given that opportunity. I never had any firm commitment from any of the owners that I would get a chance to buy in in the Spur, but I felt that because of hard work and moving up the ladder on different jobs, that perhaps someday they would give me the opportunity to be an owner.

No other employee had ever been allowed to buy in, and no other employee ever did buy in other than myself. There were, of course, employees, as I may have mentioned earlier, that were owners when the Silver Spur opened, but I was the only person that ever bought in in the Silver Spur after it opened.

How do they set the value on your percentage?

The bank appraised it.

Did you have a social life at the Silver Spur like you did at Harolds Club?

Not for me, no. There was a social life for some dealers and pit bosses, but I pretty much stayed on the outside of it. The first year I was there, when I was graveyard shift manager, we had a lot of camaraderie. The shift was a very tight-knit shift, and I spent a lot of time with them, but after that year or so, when I moved up to casino manager and swing shift manager, I completely disassociated myself with the lower-level employees.

I felt the best way to manage was to stay away from your average employee. It had nothing to do with prejudice or ego or that I thought I was better than they were or anything like that. I just felt my style of management was better served if I stayed away from them, and I also knew that was the way that Reggie Parker wanted it managed. Reggie Parker was general manager, and he had no social gatherings with any of the employees at all, any of the department heads, or anything like that. Reggie and I liked each other real well, but the entire time I worked for Reggie I never spent more than two nights with him on a social basis. He felt it is tough to manage when you become too friendly with

people. After Reggie resigned and left the Silver Spur—he was still an owner until we sold it—then Reggie and his wife Verna and myself and my wife Rose would go out to dinner, or we'd visit back and forth at each other's houses, but as long as he was working there, we just didn't associate at all.

You said he was a very quiet man. Did you spend much time talking to him at work?

No. No, we spent very little time. He was a man of few words, and how he let you know what he wanted and how he wanted it done, I don't know. I can't say that he sat down and talked to me about it.

What did he want done?

He wanted at least 110 percent effort from everybody that worked for him. He wanted a good bottom line. He wanted a tight rein on whatever department you were working in. He wanted quality. I guess, to sum it up in one word, he wanted the best. He wanted low wages and high revenue, which, of course, everyone does. [laughter]

Did he give you any tools to get high revenue, for example?

The one thing that Reggie did, and I don't remember if we've touched on this before or not, but he firmly believed that everyone should get a raise at least once a year. My theory was you give people two things: you give them a pat on the back, and you give them a monetary increase to go along with it. Neither one of them, I don't think, are as strong by themselves as they are together. Reggie was very short on compliments, but he was very liberal, as far as rewarding people monetarily, if they were successful. His theory was that, if an employee had been there a year, and they weren't worthy of at least a dollar-a-day raise, you should get rid of them.

How much did the average dealer make in those days?

The average dealer in the Silver Spur made around twenty-seven dollars, twenty-eight dollars a day. We'd give a raise of at least a dollar a day once a year. The outstanding dealers he would OK for a two-dollar-a-day raise. The average dealer, like I say, you would give them a dollar a day, or you'd give them a termination. He also had a bonus system that was highly, highly secretive. Probably only three people knew how it worked, and that would be the comptroller and Reggie Parker and the person that got the bonus. I shouldn't have said "how it worked." I meant how much money you got.

Reggie had a bonus system where he would sometimes give you cash every quarter. Every three months or so he would give you a flat amount of cash. It wasn't cash in your pocket; it was a check made out from payroll, and the deductions were made—income tax, Social Security, et cetera. So it wasn't that kind of a cash bonus, but it was cash bonus in the form of a check. What he also would do was give you incentive rewards. One night Rose and I were sitting here at home, and Reggie called on the telephone, and he said, "Have you guys ever been to Hawaii?"

I said, "No, we've never been to Hawaii."

He said, "Well, pack your suitcase, because you guys are leaving next Tuesday." [laughter]

That's the way he had of expressing himself or telling you something.

Did you appreciate that?

Really did. It was really a thrill. We had talked about going to Hawaii. It was *the* place to go in the wintertime—January, February. It was a big deal to go to Hawaii.

Reggie had gone down to the travel agency, and he'd made all our arrangements. He'd purchased the tickets, and the hotel reservations were made. We got off the airplane, and we had four days here and four days there, and we wound up staying in Hawaii for twelve days. Besides that, he gave us five hundred dollars spending money to go along with it.

There was a fellow named Joe Geegee, who was restaurant manager for a long time, and Joe was a baseball fan. He had

formerly lived in Philadelphia. So one day Reggie called him up and said, "Joe, I'm sending you back to Philadelphia." He had got tickets for Joe for some baseball games in Philadelphia.

In the keno department there were a lot of guys that liked football, and Reggie had maintained a long relationship with a fellow named Harry Weitz, who was at one time a part owner of the Palace Club. Harry Weitz always used to get Forty-Niner football game tickets. So when he would get some tickets, Reggie would give them to some of his key people in keno and say, "Here, take a couple of days off. Go down to San Francisco." He had a hotel room and football tickets for them.

He did it mainly for managers and top keno supervisors, and it wasn't based on a formula. He'd just decide how much he could afford to give, or what he felt like giving, or how good a quarter you'd had, or how good a year you'd had. It was based only on your department. It wasn't like the Cal-Neva, where bonuses were based on how good the whole place did. This was just your department. If your pit did really good, you could expect to get something, and vice versa. If you didn't do good, you didn't get any bonus.

Were you involved in anything in the community as a representative of the Silver Spur?

Not at all. After Reggie resigned as general manager, then I used to go to the Gaming Resort Association meetings as a representative of the Silver Spur, but nothing else, no Elks or no Kiwanis or no chamber of commerce, none of those things.

From 1972 until 1979 what was your job? What did you actually do?

First of all, I pulled a shift manager's job, as well as being casino manager, so it wasn't like I sat in the office. There wasn't that much paperwork involved. I worked mainly as the swing shift manager. I would work three to four nights as swing shift manager and a day or two, depending on how things were going, as a day shift manager. By being a day shift manager it was a chance for me

to touch bases with Reggie Parker, and any kind of paperwork that had to be done during the day, I would do on those one or two days. I was completely responsible for hiring and scheduling and promoting any pit bosses. I oversaw the hiring of all the dealers. In fact, actually up until 1978, no one was hired in the pit without being interviewed by me or being talked to by me. The only reason I stopped in 1978 is because when the MGM and Circus Circus opened, the Money Tree expansion opened, and the Reno Sahara opened, there was such a coming and going of dealers and employees, that for about six months we hired about anybody that walked in that could deal. There was a tremendous personnel turnover during that time frame. So I was basically responsible for the hiring and firing of all the casino employees. I oversaw the purchasing of the cards and dice, although it was pretty much done on a set routine of how many cards and dice we would use over a quarter. I was responsible for the scheduling of all three shifts, only to the degree that I told the shift manager how many people I wanted at a certain time of day or certain three-day holidays or different weekends that were busy. It was up to me to tell the shift managers how many people to schedule. I didn't tell them who to schedule, just how many.

You didn't have any responsibility or authority in any other department?

Not really. I had no direct authority over any other department.

Then in 1979 you became general manager?

Yes. In 1979 Reggie Parker resigned, and he had recommended that I become general manager, and the rest of the owners didn't really have anyone that they cared to put in as general manager. Once a month there would be an owners meeting, and one time I went to the owners meeting and was asked a few questions. Then they asked me to leave the room, and about five minutes later Reggie came out and said, "Well, you're

going to be general manager.” So that’s really how it took place. There wasn’t a lot of discussion—pretty cut-and-dried.

What was your salary?

I’m not sure of the exact figure, but I think I was increased to around thirty-two or thirty-five thousand dollars a year as general manager.

That was still a pretty big increase from where you’d been?

It was. And in 1979, thirty-five thousand was considered pretty good money.

What did the job as general manager entail?

Well, I was over every department. All the department managers reported to me. We didn’t have such things as monthly department head meetings. It was small enough where problems were solved, or decisions were made, on a one-on-one basis. If I had a problem with the restaurant manager, I would just go talk to him and work it out with him. Any decisions on the menu, I would just talk to him and settle things that way. Same way with the bar, the keno, or the slots. Many of the department managers that we had in the Silver Spur were there almost from day one or maybe day two, because after they first opened, there were few shake-ups. They were all experienced and knowledgeable, and they knew how Reggie had wanted it done, and, of course, I wanted it done pretty much the same way.

What were the typical problems you might deal with?

The biggest problems for the general manager were the payroll and the accounts payable. You had to generate enough money in the summertime and the fall to keep you somewhat solvent during the wintertime. Most of the purveyors around town in those days were very cooperative about letting you go as far as 90 or 120 days on your payables in the winter. I’m talking about

food and beverage payables, although the beverage, of course, is mandated by state law—it has to be paid within 30 days—but your restaurant suppliers, your outdoor sign maintenance, or any kind of maintenance contracts that you had, the businessmen in Reno knew that the casinos were slow pay in January, February, and March, and you could go a period of time when you didn't pay them anything, and they worked with you. Then when the better months started coming along, like April and May, you had to make a concerted effort to get them paid and get even with them and keep them current during the summertime. So keeping the club solvent and watching the payroll were probably the two biggest things. The advertising was pretty much cut-and-dried. We had billboards on the four entrances to town, and we had ads that we ran weekly in the Reno papers, and that was about it.

Who designed and placed the ads and the billboards? Did you have an agency for that?

No. We had agencies in the early years, but the last couple of years we didn't have agencies, and when I was there we didn't have an agency. I designed a lot of the ads myself, and, of course, the billboard companies helped you with the billboards, and the newspapers had people that they would send out to the office, but, between myself and a couple of people in the business office, we worked that out. We didn't have a lot of promotions like they do now. We had a few promotions in the earlier days, and one of the owners, John Gojack—that was his field of expertise. He was an advertising person, and he handled the promotions.

Did you buy many slot machines while you were general manager?

We didn't buy that many slot machines. We roughly had around 250 slot machines at that time. In 1979, 1980, 1981 the slot machines weren't becoming obsolete quite as fast as they do now. Video poker machines were just coming in around that era, and we bought a few video poker machines, and we leased a few machines, but we didn't lease that much; we were basically

purchasers. This was also about the time when the dollar machines became even looser than they had been. Machines that had a 96, 97, 98 percent return became popular. We put in maybe four or five of those dollar machines that were very liberal, and, of course, they wound up being a success, but we didn't buy that many new slot machines.

The keno game had so many qualified people that had been there for so many years that it was pretty much of a self-run operation. The keno people handled it all themselves.

Did you have a lot of dialogue with the restaurant manager about what was going on in the restaurant?

No, it was the same way with the restaurant as it was with keno. As I mentioned earlier, all the department managers had been there for several years, and it was a very easy job for me as general manager of the Silver Spur, because the bar manager had also been there for many years. The restaurant manager, keno manager, slot manager—all the same thing. The thing that really hurt the Silver Spur was when the Onslow opened. When the Onslow opened they took a few of the key employees from the Silver Spur to the Onslow. They actually wound up spreading the management team too thin, and they hurt the Silver Spur when they took some of the key Spur people to the Onslow.

What year did the Onslow open?

The Onslow opened late in 1977. That was another thing that led to the downfall of the Onslow. They were supposed to get open in May or June and catch the good summer months, but they didn't get open until just before Labor Day. So they had all the expenditures going on and no backlog of summer revenue to keep them going through the winter.

It sounds like your job as general manager consisted of just overseeing what was already there. You didn't do \$2 million or \$3 million worth of improvements to the property or buy \$300,000 or \$400,000 worth of slot machines.

That's right. Very, very little was done. You have to remember that in May of 1978 the MGM opened, and the first of July the Sahara Reno opened. The Money Tree expansion, the Circus Circus, and the Comstock all opened. The gross revenues of most of the downtown casinos plummeted. In 1977 the Silver Spur netted \$972,000, almost a million dollars. The next year, the year after the MGM opened, the revenues were down to around \$400,000. In 1979 they went down even more. So it was really a battle of survival for the Silver Spur.

How did you cope with it?

It was a very trying time. When the new clubs opened in 1978, I was still casino manager. It seemed like every new club that opened would offer the dealers a dollar a day more than they were getting, and then the next day somebody else would offer them two dollars a day more, and the dealers were really moving around. It was a trying time in the pit, because I lost a lot of good employees. They were loyal to the Silver Spur, but when somebody comes along and says, "I'm going to give you two, three, four, five dollars a day more, and pit bosses ten or fifteen dollars a day more," I couldn't blame them for leaving. I was behind them 100 percent. I didn't feel it was right for me to go. I was happy where I was, and I was doing fine.

I can remember standing in the pit on Friday night, June 30, 1978, and on July 1 at midnight three more new clubs were going to open up. At ten o'clock at night I had a full pit, seven twenty-one games, a crap game, and a roulette table going full-bore; the bar was busy; and the keno and slots were busy. Then at about ten minutes to midnight the place completely emptied out. I don't think there were ten customers left in the entire building by midnight when those other places all opened, and that was just the beginning. The next day was Saturday, and we had very poor crowds on Saturday night. Everyone that came to town *had* to go look at the new casinos. The Silver Spur, along with the other established Reno casinos, suffered, and there was a tremendous loss of revenue. We were just trying to hang on and tighten our belts and keep going with what we had.

Your first full year as general manager was 1980, and you said that you'd gotten down to \$400,000 in 1979. How did you do in 1980?

We got as low as \$150,000. I think that was our worst year. We bottom lined \$150,000. So we'd gone from \$972,000 to \$150,000 in a three-year time frame.

A great time for you to buy a club. [laughter]

Yes, I didn't do too well on that one, although I did get lucky when we sold it.

As general manager did you interview people the way you did when you were casino manager, or was that completely up to the department managers?

I had really nothing to do with the hiring of the people, other than the department managers. We lost the slot manager and the keno manager after the Onslow opened, so I had to replace them.

Did you hire the managers from outside or did you promote from within?

I promoted from within.

How did you choose people when you promoted them?

Just my general observation and overall perception of their working habits and their working abilities that I had observed over the years. They had all been at the Spur for a long time.

Who did you promote to keno manager?

Well, the first fellow I promoted was a fellow named John Riordan. John didn't work out; he didn't last too long. John was probably only keno manager for about six months. Then I promoted Chuck Thomas. Chuck was a hardworking person, a

knowledgeable keno person. Chuck took over as keno manager, and he stayed at the Spur until we sold, and he came with me when I went over and took over as general manager of the Horseshoe. So Chuck stayed with me a long time. The bar manager was a fellow named Jim Horn. He had been the assistant bar manager. I'd seen Jim work for a long time, and so I promoted Jim because of his work habits. The slot manager was a fellow named Sandy Sanderson. He had been assistant slot manager to Jimmy Gore. Jimmy Gore had left to go down to the Onslow to be slot manager, so Sandy came up through the ranks as a slot manager. For restaurant manager I promoted Bill Keene. Bill Keene had been a sous-chef and the swing shift supervisor before being named restaurant manager. Bill Keene did a good job.

Who was the casino manager?

I promoted Kent Buchanan. Kent had been my second man on swing shift. Then after Kent left to go to another casino, I promoted Steve Gerlach to casino manager, and Steve Gerlach was casino manager when the Silver Spur was sold to the Horseshoe.

It sounds like you had the same process that Reggie did. You just decided who you were going to promote. You didn't do interviews, you didn't do anything. You just called the guy up and said, "You've got the job."

That's right. [laughter] I didn't have to go to or through anybody; it was strictly my decision. I didn't have to answer to the owners or to the comptroller, as far as promotions.

What kind of instructions did you give to somebody when you promoted them?

I guess I was like Reggie. I was a man of few words. They knew what I wanted. They knew that I wanted hard work and a lot of devotion to duty.

How did they know that?

I don't know. How do you know that? How did I know what Reggie wanted? I'm hesitant to say it was by their power of reasoning or retentive memory. [laughter]

Were there job descriptions for managers?

Oh, no. No job descriptions. There was no *written* way for them to know what I wanted. We didn't do budgets, so they didn't have a budget structure to help them, but I spent a lot of time with them one-on-one. I've had people tell me that—and this is true—I wasn't that knowledgeable myself in any particular areas, even the pit or the keno or slots. I wasn't that knowledgeable, but I knew how to get people to work for me. That was my strongest point. People wanted to work with me or for me. I made *them* feel important. I made the people working for me feel important. I spent a lot of time with them. I was concerned with what their family did, what their lifestyle was like, what they wanted to do. I tried to give them a positive feeling about their jobs and themselves and tried to instill in them the feeling that they *wanted* to do a better job. I think the biggest thing I did was to take an interest in them, and they knew that I took an interest, and they knew, if they had a problem, I was very accessible to them. I feel that most of them enjoyed working for me, and the relationship still exists today. Not on a day-to-day basis, but, for example, just yesterday I went downtown, and I ran into one of my restaurant managers, a fellow named Bill Behymer. I ran into my former bar manager, Jim Horn, and I ran into Gordon Drendel, who was a shift supervisor for me in keno. Last month when I was in Vegas, I spent time with Chuck Thomas, who was my keno manager at the Silver Spur and the Horseshoe. So it was a relationship that wasn't a friendly relationship per se. We didn't spend time together off work, but we spent a lot of time together at work.

You were successful as a supervisor and as a manager. What do you think it takes to be successful as a manager?

Well, I think you have to be able to oversee all aspects of the operation. You can compare managing a casino to managing a baseball team, perhaps. Maybe the general manager isn't any more important than the slot manager. Just like in a baseball team, the pitcher sometimes can be more important than the manager, but the manager of a baseball team or a casino, or any kind of a manager, has to be able to oversee all aspects of that industry. A slot manager might be a great slot manager, but he may not realize that he has the dollar machines in the wrong place. There should be quarter machines there instead of dollar machines. The general manager should have the ability to spot that weakness and talk to the slot manager and say, "We're going to have to change this around." It's just like a baseball manager has to be able to watch that pitcher and tell him what he's doing wrong that day. Perhaps, he's releasing the ball too high, or, perhaps, he's releasing it off his front foot as opposed to his back



Dwayne Kling in his office at the Silver Spur.

foot, or he's not following through with the pitch. So the manager has to be knowledgeable enough about that to be able to tell that pitcher that there's something wrong with his delivery or his follow-through and be able to tell him what to do to correct that. Even if the manager can't do it himself, he has to be able to teach someone how to do it. I couldn't repair a slot machine, but I was able to hire a person that could.

A good manager has to be perceptive enough of the people working under him to realize what people need compliments and what people need a little kick in the butt to get them going. Some people need a lot more encouragement than others. It's the same way on a baseball team: some ball players you can chew out and tell them they're doing something wrong, and it makes a better ball player out of them; some people, if you chew them out, they completely lose their spirit, and they hang their head down, and they aren't a good ball player. It's the same way with managing casino people. I always felt that there were very few people that you had to chew out to get them going. Most people respond much better to a pat on the back and encouragement.

I also firmly believe in surrounding myself with good employees, finding the best possible people that I could and delegating authority to them. Some managers are afraid to hire a lot of qualified people, afraid that they will take their job away from them, but it was just the opposite with me. The better qualified person that I could get working for me, the better it was for me, and possibly some of that thinking came from Bill Harrah. I loved to delegate authority. The more authority I could delegate, the better.

You were satisfied with the managers that you promoted and the job that they did, and you kept them in line or kept the focus by just talking to them?

Yes, and by spending time with them. You can't just walk up to anyone, a supervisor or employee, and say, "Hi, how's it going? What's new?" and walk away. You've got to touch bases on a more in-depth basis, and you've got to touch base with them on pretty much of a daily basis, whenever possible. If you just walk up to

somebody and say, "How's it going?" in most cases they're going to say, "Oh, it's going pretty good," or "It's OK." It's just a superficial question, and it's a superficial reply, but by spending time with them, then you get more of a feeling of what their problems are, and you can help them with their problems and make their job better and make your job better and make the club more of a success. So it's time. You have to spend time with people.

Please summarize your Silver Spur experience.

I started work in the Silver Spur in February of 1971, and I started out as a glorified pit boss. They called me shift manager, but I was the only supervisor on the shift. I worked that job for about a year and then became the casino manager in 1972. I was casino manager during the best years of the small casino. Small casinos started dying out in 1978. You look at the small casinos now, and they're basically just slot arcades. You got Carl Guidici's place on Virginia Street and the Nugget on Virginia Street; the Horseshoe is a pawnshop; and the Silver Spur is a gift shop. The smaller clubs, if they are in existence, are basically slot arcades, but in the 1970s small casinos did exist, and they did make good money. So I was there during the best part of the small casino time frame. I was fortunate enough to be involved with six other owners that I enjoyed working with. They gave everyone a free hand. They gave Reggie Parker a complete free hand to run the Silver Spur, and Reggie, in turn, gave me pretty much of a free hand to run the casino. Of course, you got a free hand as long as you were doing a good job and making money. So I was fortunate enough during that time frame to make good money in the casino. I was also fortunate enough as casino manager to have time where I wasn't confined continuously to the pit. I was able to spend time in the keno game talking to the fellows that were keno shift managers or department managers. I could spend time in the kitchen and the bar talking to them about how they operated their departments, I spent time in the slot department, and I gained knowledge that definitely paid off for me in my later years at the Silver Spur. So, again, it was another learning process. In Harolds

Club I learned a lot; in Harrah's Club I learned a lot; and I continued to learn in the Silver Spur.

How often did the owners meet?

They met once a month.

Would you describe an owners meeting for me, please?

I didn't go to any owners meetings until one month prior to becoming a general manager, so I don't really know what transpired in those meetings. I know there were a lot of conflicts between the seven owners. There was a four-to-three vote on most decisions. The four-in-one clique were Conrad Priess, Everett Brunzell, Reggie Parker, and José Gastanega. In the other clique were Charlie Stepro, Tom Mullis, and John Gojack.

They had chances for possible expansions in those days, but they never did. They were offered the Old Reno Club, but the owners couldn't get together on it. They had chances to buy the Money Tree at one time. They also had chances to buy a place in Fallon, but the owners never could get together. That was the one reason they stayed in that small area—owner contention.

In the early days the first president of the Silver Spur was Tom Mullis, and he had the job as president for quite awhile. The last few years of the Silver Spur's existence Everett Brunzell was president of the corporation. The meetings that I attended were always conducted by Everett. The meetings were very seldom over an hour in length. In the early years some of the times the meetings, from what I heard, got quite argumentative. There were some very strong vocal arguments between the two different sides, but they were all fairly peaceful when I was general manager, not because I was general manager, but partly because Tom Mullis was no longer an owner. The meetings were always held a day or two after the monthly profit and loss statement came out, and it was the main topic of discussion. Each department was not exactly analyzed, but was gone over by the general manager. He would explain why the restaurant was down this month, or why the pit was up, or why the keno was up, and answer

questions, if there were any. They might talk about advertising, such as if the billboards were going to be renewed, or they might talk about changing the prices in the restaurant, things of that nature. The meetings were usually held from six to seven at night, and all the owners were usually in pretty much of a hurry to get out of there. An hour would be a long meeting.

Even when they got down to where they were only making \$150,000 a year, their own life was more important than paying attention to business?

That's right. It wasn't that they weren't necessarily paying attention to business. When Everett Brunzell was president he and I would meet for lunch every day in the Silver Spur, and we would discuss business on a daily basis. I think the reason the meetings didn't last very long is because somewhere along the line, many years prior to my taking over as general manager, the owners had been spoiled. They'd been making all these hundreds of thousands of dollars for years, and they'd seen that the Silver Spur was operated efficiently, and they'd also seen that they had very little, if any, input on what was being done in the Silver Spur. The general manager, Reggie, was a very dominant person in the meetings. He could control a lot of those people even though he had a small percentage. I think at that time Reggie only had about 7 or 8 percent of the Spur. So they didn't try and bother to give a lot of input. They just kind of came there for results, and that was it. It carried on the same way when I was general manager. Everett and I pretty much handled everything, and everything was cut-and-dried when the owners meetings came along.

When you got the general manager's job, what mandate did you get from the owners? What did they tell you to do?

They didn't really tell me to do anything. The night that they interviewed me they probably interviewed for me maybe two or three minutes. There were very few questions asked. They just wanted to know if I felt that I could handle the job, and they wanted about a two-minute description of my background. Of

course, they knew I'd been there for eight or nine years at that time, so they were familiar with me, as far as seeing my face around the establishment, but I'd had very few conversations with any of them. As far as any mandate or any instructions, none were given. They just said, "You have the job, you got the ball, run with it. Do the best you can." I guess they'd been in the habit of Reggie running it for so many years, they felt if Reggie recommended me, that was good enough for them.

Everett Brunzell, as I said, met me for lunch every day, and we would just discuss things in general. There was never an order or a mandate from Everett. You have to realize Everett Brunzell is probably one of the most courteous, friendly, diplomatic people I've ever worked with. He was very cooperative, gave me a free hand to do whatever I felt was necessary, and backed me up 1,000 percent on everything I did. Everett was definitely a hands-off manager. He was evidently happy with the work I was doing, and he let me go ahead with it. Everett was more of an investor than an operator. He served on the boards of the various casinos that he owned and took an active role in the meetings and the financial end of it, but he was not an operator.

What did you hope to accomplish as general manager, when you got the job?

Basically, just to make money. That's what I was there for: to make money, improve the gross revenue, and improve the bottom line.

Did you have a plan for how you were going to improve the revenue?

There was no plan per se. I was just going to watch the payroll, watch the expenses, and try to improve the revenue through friendliness in the casino. The big thing I worked on was food costs in the restaurant, and we accomplished quite a bit there. We raised the prices in the restaurant, to a degree, without sacrificing the quality and without actually losing any business. The restaurant, of course, in most casinos in those days was

traditionally a loser, but we got the Silver Spur restaurant to where it was a moneymaking operation.

Did you think the Silver Spur was going to fail?

I didn't think it was going to fail, but I thought it was going to have a hard time really producing anywhere near the money that it did in its glory days. It was tougher to operate in those days, because there was so much competition from the other places, and the Silver Spur, of course, had no hotel rooms, and it was the beginning of the time in Reno history when you needed hotel rooms to operate.

How did you do the job? How did you spend your time at the Silver Spur?

I think I mentioned this earlier. Basically, I spent a lot of one-on-one time with all the department managers. I was a very hands-on manager, as far as checking payrolls and checking schedules every day. I wanted to know the amount of people that were working in all the departments. Payroll is the easiest thing to cut, but, if handled wrong, you lose more revenue through giving poor service than you save by cutting payroll.

How many hours a day did you work?

I averaged working about ten hours a day six days a week and on the Sunday I would usually just go in for a couple hours. I worked six days all the time. I'd say I probably worked between fifty-five and sixty-five hours a week. A lot of it was just being there and letting myself be seen, letting people know that the general manager was there, and that I expected the department managers to be there working. Holidays such as Christmas and Thanksgiving I always went in, because my people were working, and I wanted to be there and let them know that I was also in the club. No one likes to work holidays, but I felt it was important that I was there on those days.

Did you work any swing shifts?

I didn't work swing shift per se. I would drop in on swing shift, and if there was big play in the pit, I would come down, or if we had a keno ticket hit for a sizeable amount, I would come down. So I didn't actually come in and work, but I did spend a few hours on swing shift, although not on a regular basis.

Did you have much customer contact?

A lot of customer contact. I walked around, spent a lot of time in the keno lounge visiting with people, spent a lot of time in the pit area with people. The one department that didn't get very much customer attention was the slot department. In those days, and not just in the Silver Spur, but in most casinos at that time, a lot of your slot players were overlooked. Managers in the various casinos weren't aware of how much money some of their customers were spending in the slots. So I didn't spend as much time there as I should have, and a lot of good slot players went unnoticed because of my neglect.

Did the decline in business and the competitive pressures cause you a lot of stress?

No. I was never really that stressed out at that time. I always made an effort to look optimistic and happy as I was walking around the club. When Mr. Parker was general manager of the Silver Spur he let his emotions show too much. I think, when you're in the public, as far as customers are concerned, and as far as employees are concerned, you have to put on a happy face. You have to look positive and look optimistic.

So you didn't feel any stress? It didn't cause you any health problems or any problems in your family life?

No, it didn't. It was actually exciting for me to finally become a general manager, and I didn't mind going to work. I enjoyed going to work, and I enjoyed running the club. When I first

became general manager, my wife, Rose, was dealing twenty-one at the Riverside, and a month or so after I took over as general manager, I was so busy at work and working so many hours that I didn't want her to work. So she quit work at the Riverside and stayed home and took care of things around the house. So that was the only real difference.

Nineteen seventy-eight was the opening of all the new casinos, and when we talk about the impact on the downtown casinos, we always talk about the impact of MGM and the Circus Circus. My question to you is: didn't the Onslow have more of an impact on the Silver Spur than either of those?

The Onslow definitely had an impact, because they took several of our key employees to the Onslow, and that caused quite a bit of friction between some of the owners that were in the Spur that weren't in the Onslow, most noticeably John Gojack, José Gastanega and myself. The Onslow took my day shift manager, LaVerl Kimpton, down there as pit manager. Jimmy Parker, who was the keno manager, went to the Onslow as general manager. Then they took some of the shift supervisors out of keno. LaVerl took some of my dealers to the Onslow, so we were hurt that way. Another thing they did was they took an awful lot of our customers, because they had hotel rooms. We had a lot of customers who'd been coming to the Silver Spur for years, and when the Onslow opened up with so many of the same owners and so many of the same employees going down there, a lot of the customers went to the Onslow and stayed in the hotel rooms and also stayed there and played slots, pit, or keno, and that hurt us an awful lot. The Spur lost good customers and lots of good employees.

It created a lot of animosity and a lot of friction between the owners, and it got worse as the years went by, because the Onslow never was a success. The Silver Spur always had to borrow money from the owners during the wintertime to keep going and keep current on their accounts payable, and the people that were owners in the Onslow, which were Reggie Parker, Everett Brunzell, and Conrad Priess, were forced to loan a lot of their

capital to the Onslow. So then, when it came time for the Silver Spur to ask for some money from them, they didn't have the money to lend us. José Gastanega and John Gojack would rebel against having to put up all the money for the Silver Spur, so in the long run, that was one of the major factors in the Silver Spur being sold.

In thinking about this, it sounds as though, had the Onslow never existed, the Silver Spur might have continued at nearly the million-dollar level. You divided the owners attention and their ability to put money in the business; you divided the key management people; and you divided the customer base.

That's right. It's a good observation, and in years past I've thought about it a lot. We probably wouldn't have stayed near that million-dollar mark, because of the other casinos such as MGM and Circus Circus and Sahara that opened, but I definitely feel that the Silver Spur would never have been sold, if the Onslow hadn't opened, because all those factors you mentioned created problems for the Silver Spur.

You've talked about Reggie a few times, but you haven't really described his personality. Would you give a little bit more detailed description of Reggie and his background, where he got whatever expertise he had and what he was like?

Reggie Parker came from Cotter, Arkansas, to play football for the University of Nevada. He came out with another fellow from Arkansas named Buster McClure, who played a lot of football for UNR and also played professional football later on. Reggie came out to play football, and in those days a lot of the casinos hired the football players from the University of Nevada in different departments. Most of them were what they called bouncers. We call them security guards now. A lot of the football players were bouncers in the various casinos, including Harrah's Club, Harolds Club, and the Golden. Reggie started work as a bouncer in the Palace Club and later he went to work in the keno department and soon became a shift supervisor in keno. Later, he worked at the

Overland for Pick Hobson. He, of course, had worked at the Palace for Warren Nelson. So his main expertise was his keno skill and his keno knowledge. He patterned himself after Warren Nelson a lot in the earlier days, as far as getting a lot of keno games out per hour. He believed in writing eight to ten keno games per hour. He also believed in giving away a lot of free meals and free drinks to the keno customers, and I believe that came from Warren Nelson, also. He also believed in keno runners. You don't have very many of them nowadays, but he felt that as long as you were eating a free meal in the restaurant, and you had a keno runner, you would be playing keno all the time you were eating, so there was never a loss of someone's playing time. We had keno runners running all over that place. We'd have as many as four keno runners operating in that small Silver Spur, which was only thirty-three feet wide and 140 feet deep. We'd have two keno girls on the first floor and oftentimes two keno girls on the second floor, plus twelve to fourteen stations on the first floor and maybe four or five stations on the second floor.

A station is one writer working behind the counter. So that means you would have twelve or fourteen keno writers downstairs and four or five keno writers upstairs. To put it in perspective, the MGM at the same period of time probably had less total keno writers on a shift than the Silver Spur did, and they had a thousand hotel rooms.

That's right. Keno was the main game at the Spur, and the reason why it was the main game was because of Reggie. Reggie was a very forceful person, a very hardworking person. I guess, if you had one thing to say about Reggie, it would be that he was an extremely hard worker, and he expected the same out of everyone that worked for him. He was a person that you always tried to please, but very few people could please him. Reggie was a very demanding person. I remember when I was first licensed as a key employee at the Silver Spur, Phil Hannifan was the chairman of the Gaming Control Board, and as he was questioning me prior to my getting licensed he said, "Well, I see here that you've worked for Reggie Parker for five years."

I said, "Yes, that's right."

He says, "Well," he says, "I feel that anybody that's been able to work for Reggie Parker for five years is entitled to be given a gaming license." [laughter]

So, of course, he made the recommendation that I be licensed. So that's the reputation that Reggie had, and he also had a penchant for helping kids get through the University of Nevada. He furnished jobs to students at the Palace, the Overland, and, especially, at the Silver Spur. They used to call it the "College of Arkieology," because Reggie's nickname was "Arkie." So they made a play on the word archeology, because Reggie would bend over backwards to see that people got certain shifts so that they could go to the university, and he did everything he possibly could to help them get their education. There were a lot of people that wrote keno for Reggie that wound up being doctors and attorneys, and, of course, a lot of them did stay in the gaming business, never did get out. There's several general managers and casino managers in Reno, Sparks, and Las Vegas that, at one time or another, worked for Reggie Parker and got their training from him in the Silver Spur.

You said he was pretty emotional, though. He showed his emotion a lot, which I assume you mean anger?

He was a bad loser. Yes, he showed his anger pretty easy—he was easy to get angry. [laughter] He's dead now, but there was a long-time gambler around Reno named Harry Weitz, who was part owner of the Palace Club at one time. Harry said to me that when Reggie was running a shift at the Palace Club, "I'd walk in the front door, and all I had to do was look over at keno and get a look at Reggie's face, and I could tell how the keno game was going, or if somebody had hit us for a keno ticket." [laughter] He showed his emotions that much.

So whenever somebody won, he'd get mad?

Yes, he would get very upset. [laughter] The summertime and September and October were always good months, and you tried

to put away a little bit of money to tide you over during those winter months when there was very little income. Well, in 1976 in the month of October, we must have got hit for three or four pretty good size keno tickets—five, ten, fifteen thousand-dollar tickets—and it was just really eroding our cash reserve. At the time I was still casino manager, and Reggie was general manager. Well, late in October we had another eighteen thousand dollar keno ticket, and I was working swing shift, so I had to call Reggie at home to tell him about it. Reggie came down to the club and checked the ticket and developed the film to show that everything was on the up-and-up, and he and I went down to the safe together to get out the eighteen thousand dollars. When we came up to the cashier's office he said, "Dwayne, I can't pay it. I cannot pay that ticket." He said, "If I go over there, I can't put a smile on my face." He said, "This is the frosting on the cake. This wipes out the money that we had put away." He said, "You better go pay it." He said, "I just can't do it." So, of course, I went over there and smiled and laughed and congratulated the winner and made it appear that we were thrilled to death that they won the ticket. That's the kind of loser Reggie was.

So he was good with people? With the customers he did smile and was friendly, and if he couldn't be, he went away? He hid out?

Right. [laughter] He hid out, and he hid out a lot.

As general manager, did he have a lot of customer contact?

He had a great keno following. That was all. He didn't talk to many of the people in the pit or many of the slot people, but he had keno customers that had played with him for, oh, twenty, thirty years.

Why did he resign?

I think Reggie was definitely stressed out. Reggie wasn't that old. He was in his sixties, but he wanted to go back to Arkansas in

the worst way. That's where he came from. He'd had a lot of problems at the Onslow, and he was really in the middle of the friction between the Onslow and the Silver Spur, because at the time the Onslow opened, he was the general manager of the Silver Spur, and yet he was part owner of the Onslow. I think at that time he had around 15 percent of the Onslow. So he was kind of torn, because the club that he was running wasn't doing that well, and the club that he was also an owner in wasn't doing that well. He got a lot of flak from both sides, from the owners in both casinos. He left Reno in 1979, and I think he really made a wise move, because he really wasn't capable of coping with the problems anymore. He'd been in it too long, had worked too hard for too many years, and he had worked a lot of six, seven-day weeks all through his gaming career.

He did not sell out of the Spur. He just resigned as general manager. Within a year or two after he left, he sold out of the Onslow. He's probably the only person in the Onslow that ever made any money, because when he sold, he almost doubled his money. He sold his points to a lady named Tania Maloff. He always remained an owner of the Silver Spur until we sold it to the Horseshoe and the Mason Corporation in 1981.

HORSESHOE BUYS SILVER SPUR

***H**OW DID the sale of the Silver Spur develop?*

Well, the Mason Corporation had reopened the Horseshoe in April of 1981, and they had hired Sil Petricciani as the general manager of the club. Sil, of course, was a long-time casino operator. His family had owned the Palace Club for many years, and Sil had had a lot of top-level management jobs in Las Vegas right after the war. Sil had been running the Shy Clown in Sparks for the Mason Corporation. So when the Masons closed the Shy Clown he came over, and they opened up the Horseshoe Club. Sil and I had never met each other but, naturally, when you're two general managers working next door to each other, you visit back and forth, or you go see how business is doing in his place, or he comes over and talks to you. We were talking one Sunday afternoon about how bad business was for the Silver Spur, and how bad business was for the Horseshoe, and how revenues were going down, and everything was kind of negative. So one or the other, or both of us, said, "You know, if they put these two clubs together, you could cut down on your overhead a lot. It would

make a lot of sense to have one club, as opposed to two, because they're both too small." We both agreed on that, and he said, "Well, next time Mr. Mason comes up, I'll talk to him about it."

I said, "Well, next time I see Everett Brunzell, I'll talk to him." So that's what happened. He talked to Mr. Mason, I talked to Mr. Brunzell, and we arranged a meeting. The people that went to that very first meeting were Everett Brunzell, myself, and José Gastanega from the Spur, and Mr. Mason and Sil Petricciani from the Horseshoe. Everett and Mr. Mason had known each other for many years, both having been in the contracting business, so they were well-acquainted with each other.

So the two negotiators were Mr. Mason and Mr. Brunzell, and in a few minutes they decided that either the Spur should buy the Horseshoe, or the Horseshoe should buy the Silver Spur. That was settled fairly soon. Of course, Everett had to go back and get the approval of the Spur owners on whatever we did, but we were just kind of feeling things out that day. So Everett put a ridiculous price on the Silver Spur. He said he wanted \$8 million for the Silver Spur, and Maury Mason, of course, did the same thing with the Horseshoe. He wanted \$12 million for the Horseshoe. Well, Everett said, "There's no way we're going to pay \$12 million for the Horseshoe."

Mr. Mason said, "And there's no way we're going to pay \$8 million for the Silver Spur, but maybe we should meet and talk later and see if we can come up with realistic prices."

Well, Everett went back to the other owners in a few days, and everyone wanted to sell the Silver Spur—if we got a good price—except Reggie Parker. Reggie was the only owner that didn't want to sell. Of course, it was one man, one vote, so it was decided that we would have more negotiations with Mr. Mason. Mr. Mason usually came up from his headquarters in Las Vegas one or two days a week. So the next time he came to town, Everett and I met with him again, and it got a little bit more serious. To make a long story short, within probably three to four weeks it was decided unofficially that the Silver Spur would be sold to the Horseshoe corporation, the Mason Corporation, for \$4 million. That was the price that was pretty much arrived at.

That was double what you paid for it?

Right. So I was very fortunate there. I doubled the price of my stock. I paid twenty thousand dollars a point and got forty thousand dollars a point when I sold it.

Good timing in a business that was making less revenue than when you started. [laughter]

Yes. Sil and I had first started talking about the two clubs going together in early August, and we signed the papers on December 1, 1981. The actual transfer of assets and change of management started on December 31, 1981, and the Masons officially took over January 1, 1982. We knew, of course, that the club had been sold December 1, and all the employees knew that it had been sold December 1. My responsibility as general manager of the Silver Spur was to keep it going in December and lose as little money as possible. There was no way we were going to make any money in December. We never made any money in the month of December in the Silver Spur, and I don't think we ever made any money in the Horseshoe in the month of December, either.

The reason the Masons could be licensed so fast was because we cut two large holes in the adjoining walls creating in theory one large building out of two, and they simply expanded their license. I forget exactly how many twenty-ones and craps and slots they had at the time, but all they did was add our table games and our slots to their license, so they did not have to be licensed again.

Could you give us some details of the actual transfer?

Yes, we started at eight o'clock on New Year's Eve night by emptying all the slot machines in the Silver Spur. We dropped the coins, and we also emptied the hopper. The toughest part about this was that it was being done on New Year's Eve, and, naturally, New Year's Eve is a very busy night, and there were people throughout both casinos. When we started emptying the slot machines, we actually had to push away the customers that were playing the slot machines. First came the Silver Spur people that were getting the coin out of the drop boxes and out of the hoppers, and immediately behind the Silver Spur people came the Horseshoe people. They had made up hopper fills for every slot

machine in that building, and as we emptied the hopper, they'd put in their hopper fill, and the customers would start playing again. We emptied one row or one bank of slot machines at a time, so we never closed the club down. We just asked the customers to excuse us, and we went with our money carts and took our money out, and they were right behind us with their money carts and they filled the machines up again. The hopper is the part of a slot machine where the coins are stored, and when a payout comes up, like when you hit cherries or bars, the money for that payoff comes out of the hopper. The drop bucket or drop box is where the excess of coins fall. When the hopper fills up to a certain level then it diverts the money, so that the coins fall into the drop bucket, and that's what's counted as the slot drop. So we did the slots first and then the slot change booths. We had two change booths that we had to change over.

By that time it was around eleven o'clock at night, and we'd set a tentative time of eleven to change the keno department over. It had been agreed upon that game eighty was going to be the last game of the evening, and the Silver Spur would pay the winnings on that game, and the Horseshoe would pay the next game. I always remember the last keno game we ran on the Silver Spur. We came out clean. We had to pay basically no money out. The first game that the Horseshoe took over they had a \$1,200 keno ticket, so they paid out on the first game that they had. [laughter] The keno game changed pretty quickly. We just had to shut the keno game down for a short time, and they exchanged the money drawers as we took our money drawers and put them in the cashier's cage, and they came in with their new money drawers. The toughest part was changing all the keno paper, because we had to take out all the Silver Spur keno paper and put in all the Horseshoe keno paper.

Right at midnight we changed all the table games. What we did there was we had our security guards take the drop boxes off of the table games. As soon as we took our drop boxes off that were marked Silver Spur, the Horseshoe security put their drop boxes on, and as they did that, we took our money trays out of the twenty-one tables, and they had pre-made up trays that they put on the tables. We did the same thing on the crap table and the

roulette table, but it took a little longer, because we had to bag the money and bring it into the cashier's cage. So the pit was done the same way as the slots: as the Spur was taking the money out, the Horseshoe was putting in the replacement money. We finished with the tables a little after midnight, and then we went down into the Silver Spur count room below the cashier's cage. Myself, José Gastanega, and the credit manager, Betty Heither, started counting the table drop money. As soon as we finished that, then they started counting the money in the cashier's cage.

We had around three hundred thousand dollars in the cage, and counting the cage down along with the cage personnel were the accountants from both clubs. I don't remember who the Horseshoe had as their accountant, but our accountant was a gentleman named Al Barbieri. Al had been the Spur accountant for many, many years. We didn't take our money out and put theirs in. We merely counted it and said, "Now, it's yours," and Stuart Mason wrote us a check for that amount of money.

When we finished the cashier's cage, it was five o'clock in the morning, and we'd started changing over at around eight o'clock that night, so it took us that long to complete the changeover. The longest hang-up was in the cashier's cage, because they had a heck of a time balancing out. I don't remember what their problem was, but I had to stay there, of course, until it got balanced, and Stuart Mason also stayed there. Then after Stuart wrote the check, that pretty much completed the deal. Stuart gave me the check for say, three hundred thousand dollars, and then we had a drink together, and I drove him to their apartments at Arlington Towers, dropped him off, and then I was back to work again at ten o'clock that morning. I had gone to work December 31 at eight o'clock in the morning. I worked from eight o'clock in the morning until six that night, came home for one hour and had dinner and then went back to work at the Spur at seven o'clock at night, worked until five in the morning, got home around 5:30 in the morning, and I was back at the Horseshoe again at ten o'clock on January 1 and stayed there that night until probably eight o'clock. So I put in an awful lot of time there in that two-day period.

What about the employees? Now you've got two keno managers, two slot managers, every department you go through you have two managers.

That was a tough time for me, because I had to fire a lot of people. So starting the first of December, after the sale was complete, I terminated an awful lot of people. There were a lot of hard feelings and a lot of friction at that time over the terminations, but because the Silver Spur owners were still going to be responsible for the money made or lost in December, it was my responsibility to see that we had as good a month as possible.

Sil Petricciani and I had met several times debating about who was going to be the keno manager, the slot manager, the pit manager. Naturally, Sil was sticking up for all his people, and I was sticking up for all of my people. I won just about every case. My keno manager, Chuck Thomas, was named the keno manager of both places. For my pit manager I hired Danny Troye just before the sale with the idea of Danny being my casino manager of the combined operation. I won that battle; Danny Troye was my casino manager. I had a gentleman in the restaurant named Jimmy Hughes as my food manager, and I got Jimmy Hughes as the Horseshoe food manager. I got Jim Horn, my Spur bar manager, as bar manager of the combined operation. The only department battle I lost was the slot department. They wanted their man as the slot manager, so we picked their slot manager. In less than three weeks we found out that he was embezzling money from the Horseshoe, and he was, of course, replaced as slot manager by the Spur slot manager, Sandy Sanderson. So I wound up with all the Spur department managers operating the combined operation.

And you stayed?

And I stayed.

How did that negotiation go? Why did they feel they needed to keep you?

They thought I was doing a good job. They wanted me in the worst way. In fact, the Masons met with me one day in the Arlington Towers and told me that if the sale did not go through, they were going to buy my points from me at even a more inflated price. They were going to give me sixty thousand dollars a point for my points, so that they could become part owner of the Silver Spur, and then they were going to hire me to be general manager of the Horseshoe. They had looked at the results of the Silver Spur, they'd talked to people, they'd seen what I had done with the payroll and done with different departments, and they wanted me as their general manager.

Sil stayed on also. It was confusing at first, because Sil stayed there for about six weeks, and sometimes there was confusion as to our responsibilities. Sil and I had a few philosophical differences on how gaming should be operated, but we actually worked pretty well together.

Our problem was that it wasn't completely defined what our job responsibilities were, and Sil and I were running into each other as far as authority, on occasion, but we always maintained a good relationship, and there was never any animosity between us. About five to six weeks after we were together, George Benny offered Sil the general manager's job of the River Palace. However, the property never did open. It was originally known as Lawton's Hot Springs, and it was known as the River House for awhile, and it was also known as the River Inn. George Benny overextended himself financially, and I believe he owed his creditors \$16 million when the place was finally closed. It has never re-opened as a casino. The building still stands on old Highway 40 west of town.

What were the Masons buying? The Masons paid \$4million for Silver Spur management? Was that what they were buying?

That was a lot of it. The Spur owned the business and the building, but the land was owned by Sam Gordon, and all we had was a lease on the land. At that time we were paying ten thousand

dollars a month rent. They bought the building and the business and a lot of blue sky.

It sounds pretty strange that you buy a place, and then you fire all your managers and keep the people of the place that you've bought.

Well, the Horseshoe had never been successful, and the Silver Spur, of course, had been very successful in prior years. Mr. Mason put a pencil to it and figured out how much money we could save on payroll by eliminating the various managers in the different departments, and the savings wound up making money. I don't remember exactly the first year how much money we made, but the second year we netted \$1 million, which I thought was a pretty good amount of money to make for a property that size, especially, considering that one of the properties had only made \$150,000 two years prior, and the other had probably lost money.

Would you describe Maury Mason?

Maury Mason was probably about seventy years old when I met him. He began his career as an architect in Cincinnati, Ohio. He later purchased the Taylor International Construction Company, which was headquartered in Florida. His first exposure to Nevada was when he was contracted to build the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas. Instead of taking all money for the construction of the Riviera, he took 3 percent of the hotel-casino. Shortly after, he sold his shares of the Riviera. He didn't feel comfortable with a lot of his partners. There were a lot of owners that were not too highly thought of. [laughter] Some of them had very questionable backgrounds. [laughter] One of them was a fellow named Gus Greenbaum, whose life came to a very violent ending. He and his wife were both stabbed to death with butcher knives in their home. I think Maury Mason got into a little rougher business there than he realized he was getting into, so he got out of the Riviera as soon as he could. He didn't get into gambling again until several years later.

Mr. Mason had two sons, Stuart and Wally, and they came to Reno and bought the Horseshoe Club in 1967. Stuart and Maury Mason weren't that involved in the operation of the Horseshoe at that time. Wally Mason was the general manager and more or less ran the Horseshoe when they first purchased it in 1967, and then—and I don't know why they did this—they sold the Horseshoe in 1977 to Dr. Tom Mullis, who was one of the owners of the Silver Spur, and a fellow named Jess Hinkle, who was a former executive in the Del Webb Corporation. They were out of the gaming business for maybe a year or so, and then Mr. Mason told me that Wally wanted to get back into the gaming business in the worst way. He enjoyed gambling, and he enjoyed the business, so Wally more or less convinced Stuart and Maury Mason that they should purchase a place called Rod's Shy Clown. It's now known as Baldini's. They purchased Rod's Shy Clown and renamed it the Shy Clown. It's located in Sparks on Rock Boulevard. They purchased that shortly before they started construction of the MGM Hotel in Reno. (They also built the MGM in Las Vegas.) The Shy Clown was a big hangout for all the construction workers and all the people that were working on the MGM Hotel, and it supposedly made an awful lot of money prior to the MGM opening. There again, when the MGM opened, a lot of casinos suffered revenue loss, and the Shy Clown was another one that suffered revenue loss, because all the construction workers were gone. In 1979 they wanted to expand the Shy Clown. They wanted to build a few hundred hotel rooms at the Shy Clown, but they were turned down by the Sparks City Council. The Masons figured that they couldn't make a go of it anymore unless they had rooms, so they closed it down. They just shut it down. They tried to sell it, but with no success, and it sat empty for a long time.

One of the people that came out to buy it was Mickey Gilley, the country-western singer. He has nightclubs in Texas and a few other locations, and it was his idea to buy the Shy Clown and make it a Western place with a mechanical bucking bull. That never materialized. A couple of people finally did lease it and tried to operate it as a bar and a dance floor for awhile, and that didn't work. The Masons wound up losing a lot of money on the Shy Clown, because it never did get going good again until the Baldwin

family took it over. As I said, it's called Baldini's now, and I think it's doing quite well.

About the same time the Masons closed the Shy Clown, Tom Mullis and Jess Hinkle had run out of money. They weren't able to make the payments to the Mason family, so the Horseshoe Club reverted back to the Mason family in late 1979. Then in April of 1981 they opened it up again.

Maury was an astute businessman. He was probably the sharpest, smoothest, most knowledgeable businessman that I was ever associated with. He wasn't a hands-on operator per se, but there wasn't a week that he missed coming to Reno. He'd be there bright and early in the morning, and he would have all the figures, and I would undergo a two-to-three hour—almost grilling—session with him every week. Why did this happen, and why did that happen? He definitely knew the right questions to ask, and he kept his finger on it more than anyone. Wally Mason was no longer in the family business. There had been some kind of a family dispute between Wally and his dad and his brother, and so he was never involved in the Horseshoe when I was there. Stuart would seldom come up. Stuart did not take an active part in the management at all, but Mr. Mason was there weekly. He would usually come in around twelve o'clock on a Wednesday or Thursday. He would spend that day and that evening, and he would be in there early the next morning and fly home again around noon. So he would spend about twenty-four hours in Reno, and he would spend about eighteen of those hours in the club.

I take it he gave you more direction than Everett did.

Yes, he did. Mr. Mason gave me a lot more direction, and he asked me a lot more questions.

Did his direction help the place succeed?

I think it did. He had an observant eye. He was always looking at things and seeing things. He was the kind of person that made me work even harder, because he would see different things that I wouldn't see, and he would cause me to take action.

Can you give me an example of that—what he saw that you didn't?

One day we were sitting in my office upstairs, and he went to the restroom. When he came back he sat down, and in his hand he had a cocktail napkin, and he said, "Dwayne, do you know how much these napkins cost?"

I said, "No, but I can find out."

Then he said, "The reason I asked how much these napkins cost is because these cocktail napkins are in the restroom. They are put there for people to wipe their hands on?"

I said, "I had no idea. I didn't notice that."

He said, "Well, I don't know how much they cost, but I can guarantee you this, paper towels cost less than these napkins do." He said, "Why don't you have paper towels in there?" So, by his question, he did two things: first of all, he caused me to find out what the cocktail napkins did cost; and second of all, he made me be aware of the fact there were no paper towels in there, and we should have paper towels in there, as opposed to having cocktail napkins.

Any other examples of the kind of things that he saw?

He always thought we had one too many dealers or one too many pit bosses. [laughter] He would bring that to my attention, and he wasn't necessarily right. If I could explain to him, which I did many times, "Well, we have a pit boss here, because of that," or "We have this many keno writers, because we're going to have some business coming in today," or "There's a tournament coming up," or things like that, he was all right with that. He wasn't chastising you. He was just asking questions to make *you* think. It was kind of the Aristotle method. He didn't answer a question. He would ask a question, and he would be satisfied with the answer, if it was the right one. The food in the restaurant was always a big concern of his. He was the fellow that taught me to look in the garbage cans and see what was in them, see what was being thrown away. He would go look in the garbage cans—he only caught me once on this—and then he would come and ask me, "You know what's in the garbage can today?" [laughter]

I said, "No, I don't."

He said, "Well, I've just come in from the garbage cans, and there's a lot of fried chicken in them. Why are we putting so much on the plate?"

Another one he was big on was, "An awful lot of French fries in the garbage." He said, "They must be serving too many French fries with those sandwiches. Why don't you cut down on the portions of French fries?"

Did you ever rake the garbage to see if there was any silverware in it?

Yes, I've done that. [laughter]

How about the slot machines?

He would study the slot machines, but he didn't really look at them that much. He left that pretty much to myself and Bob Brodie, who was controller. The one thing he did with the slot machines—and this was kind of contradictory, and it had to be an ego trip—he wanted five hundred slot machines in that property, and we really didn't warrant five hundred slot machines. He said, "I want five hundred slot machines." I would show him that we had some slot machines that were old slot machines or slot machines in areas where they weren't getting any play, and they were making only three or four dollars a day. That's all their earning power was, not enough to pay their tax and license. I would tell him that if we cut down to four hundred machines we were going to pay less in taxes and less in license fees, and we would generate just as much revenue. I finally came to the conclusion that he wanted to be able to hang out with his buddies in Las Vegas and be able to say, "Yes, at the Horseshoe we've got five hundred slot machines." It was kind of a magic figure to him, I think, to be able to say he had five hundred slot machines.

I had to call him every morning no matter where he was. His office was in Vegas, but he did travel a lot. One summer he spent about thirty days traveling in Europe, and he would call me every day from Europe. I'd get a call from Paris or Berlin or the Gold

Coast or French Riviera or whatever. He called every day, and part of the reason he called is just to see that someone was there paying attention, and that someone was minding the store. On a normal day when we'd finished the soft count, and we knew how much the pit and keno had won, the first thing I had to do was call Las Vegas, do a little chitchat with Mr. Mason for a few minutes, and then give him all the numbers. I told him what the pit had done and what the keno had done, and on the days of the slot drops you would call him immediately after the slot drop and let him know the results.

How many days a week did you do slot drops?

We dropped the slots twice a week, as a general rule.

His close supervision was a huge change from what you'd been used to at the Silver Spur. Did you like it?

Not really. I didn't really enjoy it, but actually, it was more businesslike, the way it was done by Mr. Mason. I think everybody needs a few checks and balances, and he gave me plenty of that. Not that I enjoyed it, necessarily. [laughter] I didn't enjoy calling him up in the morning and telling him that we had lost money, and the slot drop wasn't that good, but I did it.

Mr. Mason was a pipe smoker. [laughter] He almost continually had a pipe in his mouth, and he would sit there and look at you with that pipe stuck in his mouth, and he'd be sucking on that pipe and say, "How come we aren't winning more money in the pit, Dwayne?" He says, "Are you *sure* there's nothing wrong down there? We're only holding 14 percent now, and that crap table got beat again." A lot of his questions were unanswerable like, "Why aren't you doing so well?" [laughter] He was a tough taskmaster, but a classy gentleman, very dignified gentleman. A lot of people didn't like Mr. Mason, but I enjoyed working for him, and I had a lot of interesting conversations with him. So it was a good time in my life that way, but he caused me more stress in one day than Mr. Brunzell caused me in a year. [laughter]

I always did like Mr. Mason, though. The employees would call him "Old Man Mason," not in a derogatory sense, but to distinguish him from Stuart Mason. Also, "old man" is a term that was used in the military a lot; it meant that he was the leader. He was a tough guy to work for, but even to this day I admire him. He had an awful lot of good points about him, and he did an awful lot of interesting things, but after I'd worked as general manager for not quite two years, I decided that I wanted to take some more time off, so I went to Mr. Mason and said that I would like to step down as general manager. He really didn't want to see me go, but he didn't have any hard feelings that I was going to step down. He asked me to stay on the payroll in an advisory position and as a customer relations person, because I knew so many customers from the Horseshoe and the Silver Spur. Also, he felt it would be an easier transition period if I stayed on.

He asked me how much I wanted to be paid, and it was a hard decision, because I didn't want to ask for too much, because I didn't really plan on working that much, but I didn't want to ask for too little either. So I settled on a figure of eighteen thousand dollars, and I went from fifty thousand dollars a year to eighteen thousand dollars a year, but also my working time went from about sixty hours a week down to probably ten to fifteen hours a week.

That was a good time in my life, because for the next three years Rose and I traveled more than we probably did any other time the rest of our lives. We took three or four three-week trips a year. So there were nine to twelve weeks a year where we were traveling somewhere in the United States. In the meantime, I had my eighteen-thousand-dollar-a-year job when I was in New York City, Chicago, Omaha, or wherever. I was getting paid that on a weekly salary, and I was also covered by insurance. When I came back to Reno, I'd check in at work.

One of my main jobs was talking to Mr. Mason whenever he came into town. We'd talk over how things were going. I, of course, had all the figures of the club, as far as the profit and loss statements, or the winnings in the keno and the pit, and any of the gaming winnings, so I was well-versed in what was going on. The two people that were running it were Mike Hessling, the general



Dwayne Kling officiating at a Black Jack tournament at the Horseshoe.

manager, and his assistant, Mike Shubic. They had a lot of different ideas about what they wanted to do in the Horseshoe. It was the first really big casino job for either one of them. The one problem they had—well, they had several problems—was they would sit down in the office and come up with all these marketing plans and all these different ideas on how things should be done, but it was strictly on paper. There was no mingling with the customers, and there was no time spent in the club afterwards to see how it worked out. For example, they would have a keno tournament on a weekend, or they would have a special promotion on a weekend, but come along Friday night at five o'clock, they were out of the building, and you didn't see them again until sometime Monday morning. So it was a case of putting something into effect, but not being there yourself to see that it worked or how it worked or what went wrong. To me, when you do

something like that, you have to be there to help make it go and see, if it didn't go, why it didn't go.

Can you give us a little background on Hessling and Shubic and how they got the job?

Mike Hessling had a master's degree in business administration and finance, I believe, from Harvard—I'm not sure—but he was a well-educated person in the financial world. Mike Shubic graduated from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Mike Hessling had had several good jobs in Vegas as a comptroller and an accountant, but he had never been in the gaming end of the business. Mike Shubic hadn't been in the gaming end of it, either. I'd say, at the time, they were probably thirty-two to thirty-five years of age, and they got along well with Stuart. Stuart liked younger people, and he liked their aggressive attitudes and their aggressive manner. They were both working in Las Vegas at the time, and neither one of them really cared to come to Reno, but when Mike Hessling interviewed for the job with Stuart Mason, he asked him, "Well, how much does the job pay?"

Stuart asked him, "How much money do you need to come to Reno to take over the job?"

Mike Hessling told me afterwards, "I just told him eighty thousand dollars a year, figuring that they wouldn't offer me that much money, because I knew you were making fifty thousand dollars running it, and I thought, 'Well, I'll ask for eighty.'"

Stuart said, "OK, we'll pay you eighty thousand dollars."

So Hessling said, "Well, if you're going to pay me eighty thousand dollars, I'll take the job."

How much did they pay Shubic?

Shubic got around fifty thousand dollars a year.

So they paid \$130,000 to replace you?

Yes. [laughter]

That was a bargain. [laughter] How long did they stay?

They stayed until, I think, about 1985. They stayed about two years.

When they took over, you were making \$1 million a year for the Horseshoe?

Yes, and I wish I could tell you what the club was making when they left. It was much, much lower than that. I don't think they ever hit one million dollars, but I'm not sure.

What caused it to go down?

The main reason that the Horseshoe eventually went down, went busted, went bankrupt, was because of the outside problems that the Mason family had. The parent company was called Taylor International Construction Company, and they had built the original MGM in Las Vegas that had been destroyed by fire in the late 1970s, maybe 1980. When the MGM burnt down there it cost the Masons millions and millions of dollars. They were the general contractor for that building, and they had millions of dollars of lawsuits. They had millions of dollars of attorney fees that were cutting into their cash flow. At the same time that that happened a winery and some vineyards that were owned by Taylor International ran into a couple of bad weather years, and their grape crops were just almost totally wiped out. So they were losing millions of dollars on their winery and vineyard, and they were losing millions of dollars on the lawsuits from the MGM fire. Also, their credit rating was affected by all those lawsuits, and also their credibility as far as a builder, or as a contractor, was *severely* damaged when the fire burnt down the MGM Hotel with loss of many lives. So their construction business completely deteriorated. No one would hire them to build anything. At one time they had hundreds of people working for them in their contracting business, and less than a year after the fire they wound up with about twelve people working for them, and they

were reduced to doing remodeling jobs and building a few spec houses.

So, in the meantime the only source of cash revenue that they had was the money that we were making at the Horseshoe. So a lot of people think that the Horseshoe went bankrupt because of mismanagement or lack of business or whatever, but the biggest problem was the fact that we had to send any money that we made to corporate headquarters in Las Vegas, and in so doing, we lost in many ways. We weren't able to go out and hire good slot mechanics, for example, or we weren't able to pay top wages in any of the departments. We couldn't hire a lot of people that we wanted to hire, because we couldn't offer them enough money. We always had to be so concerned with the payroll. One of the other big problems was we weren't able to give our employees any kind of raises or any kind of merit increases. Our advertising program went completely down. We cut out advertising almost completely.

The carpeting wore out, and we used to joke about it. We had more duct tape on the carpet holding it together than we had carpeting material. The restrooms deteriorated. The bar stools, the twenty-one stools, the tables in the restaurant, as well as the gaming tables, started looking worn out. The whole club started looking run-down and dirty.

You said he was the most astute businessman you ever met.

Yes, but he got caught in a terrible situation to have those two things happen to him at the same time. The fire and the weather problems that eliminated his winery and his vineyard were awfully tough to cope with, no matter how astute you were.

But he still killed his cash cow; he strangled it.

Yes, he did, but it became a real matter of survival for him; he had to throw something to the wolves to keep them away from his door. He was just trying to hang on. Maybe he thought the winery would come back again, or the weather would get better in Santa Barbara, and the vineyards would come back again, or his

building credibility would come back again. He was trying to hang on.

Did the winery come back?

No, the winery never came back. They completely lost their winery and all their vineyards. The only thing that saved them in the construction business, finally, was that Kirk Kerkorian and Mr. Mason were good friends, had been good friends for many, many years. I don't know how far back they went, but when Mr. Kerkorian built the latest MGM in Las Vegas, Taylor International was hired as the contractor for that job, and that job got the Taylor International Construction Company and the Mason family back into good financial standings.

Now, let's go back to the two Mikes managing the Horseshoe. They were there about two years, and then they resigned, or he fired them?

Yes, they were there about two years, and then they resigned. They could see that they weren't going to do any good there, and they felt that there were more opportunities for them in other places. Part of their reason for leaving was that the Horseshoe was deteriorating, as I mentioned earlier, looking dirtier and going down hill, and they could see they weren't going to get any money to improve it. When any kind of a property or any kind of a business doesn't do well, it naturally reflects on the management, and I think they wanted to get out of there before their reputations were ruined.

They left, and then who was the next general manager?

The Masons appointed as general manager a young lady named Jerry Raasch. Jerry had been the Masons' executive financial secretary for probably five to seven years. She handled all their private affairs, their private businesses, their private business lives, and she was also in charge of the financial end of all the Taylor businesses and all the Mason businesses. She had

started coming up to Reno once a week, because Mr. Mason and Stuart Mason both wanted her to become familiar with the property and become a little bit more familiar with the gaming business. So when the two Mikes resigned, the Masons asked her to take over as general manager. I think that's what the Masons had planned on doing for quite awhile. When they did put her in charge, they asked me if I would come back to work full-time as assistant general manager and director of the gaming. I was ready to come back to work full-time then, so I accepted the offer. Jerry was easy to work for, and I helped Jerry a lot, and she helped me a lot, because she knew that I didn't want to work any of those fifty, sixty-hour work weeks anymore. She was a good personnel person; she got along well with the employees. She was great with the customers. The customers all loved her, and she spent a lot of time in the club. She probably averaged ten to twelve hours a day in the club, and she enjoyed every minute of it.

She was better than the two Mikes?

She was better than the two Mikes, yes. She had no casino background, whatsoever, just a business background, and I don't think she even had a college degree. Her favorite saying was, "We've got to get our ducks in a row."

Were you already behind in your payments at that point?

Oh, yes. Yes, we were behind on our payments. Somewhere during the time the two Mikes were running it, we started going behind on the payments.

Were they behind on their Social Security tax payments and their insurance payments at that point, or was that later?

No, that was later. That was later.

They were just behind on their vendor payments?

Yes, everybody was running 90 to 120 days late, and the purveyors were getting only partial payments, so she fielded a lot

of those questions, and Bob Brodie, who was the comptroller, fielded a lot of those questions, also.

Was she able to keep any more money in the operation and fix any of the problems?

She was able to keep a little bit more money. The best thing about her was the fact that she had such a good rapport with both Maury Mason and Stuart Mason. She could talk to them and wheedle them into allowing us to send less money to Las Vegas, or she could convince them that we've got to fix these bar stools, or we've got to fix part of the carpet, or we've got to do something to bring in a little bit more business. So she was very good that way, mainly through her long-time association with the Masons.

You said she also had a broader view of all their businesses.

Yes, she really understood everything about their business, where they needed money and where they didn't, and she was the only one that ever did. When I was general manager, or when the two Mikes were, we never really had an in-depth look at the ramifications of the fire or the collapse of the winery and the vineyards, but she had a broad overall picture of the entire operation.

You said you were ready to come back. This may be a good point to tell why you thought you were ready for retirement in the first place, and why you thought you were ready to come back.

Well, there were two reasons I stepped down. One reason was that I was getting tired of working as many hours as I did with the Masons, and I did want to travel a lot more. I thought, "I'm at a time in my life where I should get out and see the United States and see the country." I really wanted to do that, and I thought that I had plenty of money at that time to semi-retire and get along comfortably without going for that top job anymore.

In 1977 when I was working at the Silver Spur, I'd asked a couple of the owners of the Silver Spur who were investing in the Onslow if they would allow me to buy into the Onslow Hotel, and

I was told, "No." So I decided at that time that I would invest in unimproved property. The first piece of property I bought was in Portola, California. I bought a five-acre piece in Portola for a couple of thousand dollars and five hundred dollars down. Soon afterwards I sold that piece of property for five thousand dollars, and with that sale I generated enough of a down payment to buy another piece of property. The payments I was getting on the first piece of land made the land payments on the second piece. To make a long story short, I eventually bought land in Fallon, Fernley, Silver Springs, and more land around the Portola area. Also, I was one of the owners of the Silver Spur when we sold it, so I had doubled my original investment in the Silver Spur, and the Masons were paying me on that sale every month.

I don't remember exactly how much of an income I had coming in in 1983 when I semi-retired, but as a lot of people do, I underestimated, and I thought I had enough money coming in, but the older you get, you realize you never have enough money coming in. [laughter] I didn't want to drop dead working at the Horseshoe for the Mason family, either, so that's why I backed off when I did.

So by the time you came back in 1985, you thought you needed to make more money again?

Yes, and I don't remember what they paid me when I came back to work full-time. I replaced Mike Shubic, and he was making fifty thousand dollars a year, but I took the job for less. I would say probably forty thousand dollars. Just guessing, I don't know for sure, Jerry might have made fifty thousand dollars. I know she made way less than Hessling did.

Did they give incentive pay at all? Did they give bonuses for anything?

Never. Never from the day I went to work for them. Never gave any kind of a bonus.

Do you think they would have, if they hadn't been in so many financial difficulties?

I don't know. I never talked to anyone that ever worked for them in the early years when they owned the Horseshoe in the 1960s, or when they owned the Shy Clown in Sparks, that said that they were given any bonuses.

How long was Jerry general manager?

She was general manager for about two years. Then she came to the conclusion that she wasn't getting anywhere with the Horseshoe or with the Mason family, and when she was offered a job with Proctor and Gamble in the main headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio, she left the Horseshoe and went to work for Proctor and Gamble. At that time Mr. Mason asked me to take over as general manager, so I did.

How much did they pay you this time?

They paid me fifty thousand dollars a year, and the handwriting was really on the wall. It may have been another reason that Jerry left, too. We were really getting short of money. As I'd said earlier, it creates a snowball effect: when you don't have a nice looking, attractive place, and you don't have the best help in the world, then your gross revenue starts going down, and then the club deteriorates even more. There was really not much I could do, because the Masons were still pounding at me to send more money to Las Vegas. They still needed money to pay this off and pay that off, and it was really a tough way to go the last year I worked there. I did resign for the last time in October of 1988, and at that time there was no money at all. Nothing. We were just really hanging on by our fingernails.

By then they were not making the Social Security tax payments or the insurance payments. They were collecting the money, but not disbursing it, is that right?

Yes, but I didn't know it at the time. I didn't know that the money that was being deducted from people's wages were not being paid to the proper agencies, and that shows you how desperate they were. If I'd have known that, I'd have got the hell

out of there a lot earlier than I did. [laughter] I didn't find out about that until a few months after I left the Horseshoe. The Horseshoe closed January 1, 1989. So it closed about three months after I left. I left in October of 1988, but I'd already given my notice to Mr. Mason about six weeks prior to that. He asked me not to make it public until later on in the year, because he felt that if all the employees knew that I was leaving, that they would all want to leave. At that time of year it was still easy to get a job in another casino, but later in the year like November or December it's pretty hard to find a job. I guess that wasn't very nice on my part, but I felt that I owed that much to Mr. Mason. He asked me not to divulge that information, so I followed his request and didn't let anyone know until October. I had received a job offer from Josh Ketchum, who was opening up the Ponderosa Hotel-Casino on South Virginia Street, and that was the reason I left. Bob Brodie took over as comptroller and general manager.

He must have known it was going to be closing?

Oh, I'm sure he did.

He knew better than anybody, because he was the one that wasn't making the payments.

Yes, right.

So he knew he was just going to guard the door until it was closed?

Yes, because, as you well know, January 1 is when a great deal of gaming taxes are due, and I'm sure he must have been pretty aware of the fact that he wasn't going to be able to pay the taxes in January. After I left, they cut the pit down to almost nothing and closed the keno game, trying to cut the payroll and save the club, but it was impossible. One thing I've said two or three times, and I'll say it again, the Horseshoe did not go down because of any management shortcomings; it went down because the Horseshoe Club had to send practically all their earnings to the Las Vegas headquarters to keep the parent corporation afloat.

You said earlier that Mr. Mason was buying three things when he bought the Silver Spur. What were they?

When he bought the Silver Spur, he was buying the keno game, he was buying the restaurant, and he was buying Silver Spur management. Those were the three things he was buying.

Had the MGM already burned down when he bought the Spur?

Yes, but I'm sure he didn't know how financially responsible he was going to be, and the other major problem, the vineyards and the winery, had not happened yet. They were doing good. They made good money in the winery the first year or two that we were together.

And the first two years the club made \$1 million a year just by combining the properties?

The first year we didn't make \$1 million, but we did the second year.

How did that work? If neither one was making money before, I don't understand how you got to making money.

The Silver Spur was making a little bit of money. I think we made \$150,000 the last year we were open, something like that, and I think the Horseshoe just about broke even. The debt from the purchase of the Silver Spur was kept with the corporate headquarters, so it did not reflect on the profit and loss statement of the Horseshoe. The Horseshoe Club itself did not make payments on that debt.

A great deal of money was saved in salaries. We eliminated about ten department managers. We eliminated a pit manager, a keno manager, a slot manager, a restaurant manager, an executive chef, a comptroller, a maintenance/building manager, a purchasing agent, et cetera. So, say, we eliminated ten management jobs at twenty-five thousand dollars a year, that would be a quarter of a million dollars. The amount of payroll saved in staff jobs was also sizeable. We saved up to, maybe, a half

million dollars in payroll, and the other half million dollars came from increased revenue.

We didn't have any great new additions. We didn't have a gourmet restaurant, or we didn't have a lot of high roller players coming in. We were far from a destination resort. So it had to come in from the increased revenue in the pit, slots, and keno.

Did they redecorate, or did they just open it up the way it was?

The major thing that we did was we knocked the wall out between the two buildings. Between Fulton Alley and Virginia Street there was one bearing wall that went all the way from the alley to Virginia Street, and in about the middle there were two bars. There was a bar in the Silver Spur, and there was a bar in the Horseshoe, and the bars were exactly across from each other. When we tore the wall down, we also tore the wall down that was in the middle of the two bars, and the bars were exactly back-to-back. Mr. Brunzell, who was president of the Silver Spur and a contractor in Reno and Lake Tahoe and Vegas for many years, had built both the Horseshoe building in the 1950s and the Silver Spur in 1967, and somewhere in the back of his mind he'd always thought, "Well, there's a possibility that these two clubs could go together." So he'd built the wall and the bar so that if you did tear the wall down, you could go ahead and operate it as one facility. So creating an opening between the two bars, we were able to cut a lot of labor costs out of the bar. For example, on graveyard, whereas, before, there had been one bartender in the Spur and one in the Horseshoe, now one bartender could cover the entire bar, and on swing shift, when you had two bartenders on both sides in previous years, now you could operate the one big bar with two, maybe three bartenders, at the most.

The same thing was true in the restaurant. When the two clubs went together, we did eliminate the Silver Spur restaurant completely, because it wasn't as large as the restaurant-coffee shop in the Horseshoe side. We did keep the same menu, but moving the restaurant might have been part of the downfall of the Horseshoe. Although the Horseshoe restaurant never did really lose that much money, it never was as big a moneymaker as the Silver Spur restaurant had been.

Did you combine the keno games, too?

Yes, we combined the keno games. We completely eliminated keno on the Horseshoe side. We tried to run it as an outstation for awhile, but it didn't work. So all the keno was on the Silver Spur side. We also kept the outstation on the second floor of the Spur side.

Would you say it was a success, the putting together the two clubs?

The putting together of the two clubs would have been a success if we hadn't had all those financial problems with Mr. Mason's other businesses. The idea was a good idea; it would have been workable, but our lack of cash caused the property to deteriorate, and it eventually led to its downfall. It actually lasted seven years.

You have said that in the Silver Spur you knew 75 to 80 percent of the customers, and that the Silver Spur employees knew a great many of their customers?

That is true only until 1978.

Up until 1978? So that wasn't true afterwards?

Not as much.

It wasn't true in the Horseshoe, either?

No, when the new casinos opened in 1978, it was a big drain on the Silver Spur customers. Another thing we touched on earlier was that when the Onslow opened, we had a tremendous drain on our customer base. In 1979, 1980, 1981, a lot of our customers were just people that were overflows or people that we'd sucked in off the street.

Did you change your management style after you met Mr. Mason?

As far as changing it, I think what I did—and now I know it was a mistake—I tried to manage it like he wanted it managed, instead of doing it my own way. I always tried to manage the way that the owners wanted it managed, because I've always felt that one of your first jobs as an employee is to find out what your boss wants and to do what he wants, but I found myself a lot of times doing things that Mr. Mason thought was right that I didn't agree with.

Can you give me an example?

Mainly on payroll and treating of people. He felt that I spent too much time with the employees trying to make them happy and trying to make it a comfortable place to work. He was more of a numbers man, and he couldn't see the long-range picture. A lot of times I would keep people working, even though we didn't need them working, knowing that within a month or two business was going to pick up again. By keeping someone working, we didn't have to terminate a good employee, and then, two or three months down the road, go out and hire somebody off the street, not knowing what kind of an employee we were getting. I felt it was better to lose the battle and win the war. I'd rather have a little higher payroll and benefit from it in the long-run. That was the big thing, and it is with so many owners. The first thing that everyone always cuts is the payroll—they go in looking to cut the payroll. You could never cut the payroll enough for Mr. Mason. In the Silver Spur, if the payroll would be too high, Conrad Priess would usually be the only one that would say, "Your payroll is too high." So in the Spur I kept the payroll as high as I felt it should be, but with Mr. Mason you wouldn't dare do that; I would bow to his wishes to cut the payroll. I really think by saving one dollar today, it cost you two dollars down the road.

All the owners that you worked with thought about their money monthly, and not about how to build the business. Does that seem true to you?

Yes. The Spur could have been a lot bigger place than it turned out to be, because so many of the owners looked at that day-to-

day, or that monthly cash flow, instead of looking at the long-run. The only fellow that looked at the long-run was Reggie Parker—and Brunzell, to a degree.

It seemed, too, that when they went out to make an investment, they made a bad investment. They built the Onslow, and they hurt themselves.

Right.

And you and Silvio Petricciani came to them with a plan where everybody made money, and it was better for everybody when the two clubs were combined?

Yes, and we could have bought the Horseshoe, if the Silver Spur owners hadn't been so in debt, or having problems with the Onslow, and if they had had a broader vision, they could have said, "Hey, we can buy the Horseshoe, and we can be the Horseshoe-Silver Spur," it would have been a good moneymaker. The Horseshoe would probably still be open to this day, because we wouldn't have had the problems the Masons did. The Silver Spur could have made a go of it, if they'd bought the Horseshoe. Also, looking back on it, if the Silver Spur would have not sold to the Horseshoe, they probably would have been able to make money, but not as much as the owners would have wanted. We would have had to cut way down and probably pretty much eliminate the pit, but the Silver Spur could have made it. Of course, I was one of the ones that wanted to sell, and one of the reasons that I wanted to sell is that I had borrowed thirty thousand dollars to buy my share of the Silver Spur, and this was when the prime rate was running anywhere from 19 to 21 or 22 percent, and my payments to the bank were tied into the prime rate. [laughter] So my bank payments had gotten pretty high, and so I wasn't making that much money as an owner, and I was shortsighted. All I saw was that I would double my money if we sold. I should have just toughed it out in the Silver Spur.

Also, if we would have waited two years or so until the Mason problems really got bad, we probably could have bought the

Horseshoe pretty cheap. At the time, the Silver Spur owners buckled under too easy, because, as I said earlier, it was, "Is the Spur going to buy the Horseshoe, or is the Horseshoe going to buy the Spur?" When the owners saw that \$4 million price tag, they jumped on the \$4 million.

There seems to be a big difference between your Harolds Club experience, your Harrah's experience, and your experience in the Silver Spur and the Horseshoe. Would you tell us what the difference was?

I think the big difference between the Harolds and Harrah's people I worked for, and the Spur and the Horseshoe people, are the words investors versus operators. The Smith family were operators. The Smith family were gambling people, and the same way with Harrah. Harrah was a gambler. That was his business. That was all that the Smiths and Harrah knew. Every major owner in the Spur was an investor: Conrad Priess, Everett Brunzell, José Gastanega, John Gojack. They had no gaming background. They were not operators of a casino. When you're an investor you invest money to get a return on your money, and the Masons were the same way. They invested; they were not really operators. They had "operated" the Horseshoe in the 1960s, and they had "operated" the Shy Clown. But in the true definition of the word "operators", they were not operators, they were not gamblers. They were basically investors, and that to me was the difference.

Every owner of the Silver Spur that I ever talked to said that the Silver Spur was the best investment they ever, ever made. Their initial investment was \$500,000. When you realize that in their top year, 1976 or 1977, they made \$972,000, they made almost \$1,000,000 in that operation. They also had about five or six years where they made \$500,000 or more, so you can just calculate what the return was on their investment. Then, to wind up selling it for \$4 million was just really a capper. So they made millions during its eight or ten good years for practically no operation involvement whatsoever.

And then didn't some of the Spur owners lose money in the Onslow?

Yes, it's hard to say how much Conrad Priess and Brunzell lost in the Onslow. Dr. Mullis, one of the original owners of the Spur, lost everything when he went into the Horseshoe, so there's three people that had sizeable losses. John Gojack was not an investor in any other club, and José Gastanega was not an investor in any other club at that time. He'd been in the Ponderosa many years ago, but José was not in the Onslow. The money that was made in the Spur by some of the owners was lost in other casinos. The same way with the Masons, of course.

When the Onslow Hotel opened, Reggie Parker was part owner of the Onslow Hotel, and he was trying to actually operate the Silver Spur as a general manager, and the Onslow as unofficial general manager. He was trying to get it open, get it completed, and he was hiring a lot of the employees. During that time Reggie and I got into the biggest argument that we ever got into. He was using some of the Silver Spur employees to help him get the Onslow open, especially in the credit office and the cashier's cage. It's kind of funny, because I was actually just an employee of the Silver Spur, and I was telling the general manager and part owner of the Silver Spur that he shouldn't be using the Silver Spur people to get the Onslow started. He was actually paying them on the Silver Spur payroll, which, of course, really wasn't right at all, either ethically or legally. If he would take somebody down there and work them in the Onslow for an extra four hours or eight hours, he would charge that against the Silver Spur, and we got in quite a heated argument about that, and he wound up firing me. He said, "You're fired, Dwayne. Get out of here. You're not working for me anymore."

I said, "Fine," and I left and went home.

The next morning the phone rang, and Reggie said, "Well, I'm hiring you back again. You come right on back." [laughter] So, of course, there was never any paperwork done on my termination, but he flared up and got so angry about it that he terminated me there on the spot.

Did it change your relationship at all? Did he have less credibility in your mind after he'd done that?

No, not a bit. I kind of loved the guy. In a way, he had become almost a father to me. I used to get mad at Reggie a lot, but it never lasted for any length of time. I enjoyed working for Reggie, and it was just one of those things you live with. [laughter] A lot of people couldn't live with it, I guess, but I didn't . . . I shouldn't say I didn't have any problem with it; I did have a problem with it, but I would overcome it.

You had another story about him refusing to allow Bally slot machines on the property because of his relationship with Si Redd. Do you want to tell that story?

He didn't completely refuse all Bally slot machines. We had some Bally slot machines in there, but he just really didn't want to get in bed completely with Si Redd. He thought Si Redd was too flamboyant, that he was too full of baloney. He didn't like people that were as much of an extrovert or a salesman type of person that Si Redd was, and he always felt that if you gave Si Redd an inch, he would take a mile from you. One of Reggie's idols was Warren Nelson. Of course, Warren Nelson and Si Redd were very close in business operations, and Si Redd got his foot in the door at the Cal-Neva quite strongly, but it was one of the few times that Reggie went against Warren Nelson's advice or Warren Nelson's way of operating. There was just such a personality clash between Reggie and Si Redd that Reggie wound up hurting the Silver Spur to a degree, because we never really got involved with Si Redd until Reggie left the Silver Spur and went back to Arkansas. It put us way behind on the dollar slots. We kept going along with those old "doggy" dollar slot machines. We had very little dollar slot play. Shortly after I took over as general manager, we did become more involved with the looser slot machines, which, of course, in the long-run, gave more return to the casino.

You also said about Maury Mason that, because of the financial pressures, you could never buy any slot machines?

We were really handicapped at the Horseshoe Club, because of the money shortages and the lack of credit. We wound up

operating with a lot of old electromechanical slot machines that didn't make that much money. Mr. Mason had no problem with operating with Si Redd, but Si Redd wanted to get paid when we were buying slots from him. [laughter] The Horseshoe and Mr. Mason didn't have enough money to work with Si Redd as much as we should have.

So that, too, kept the Horseshoe behind the curve on what was popular and what was making the most money.

That's right. Yes, we were very slow moving up into the new world of loose dollar slot machines.

PONDEROSA, PEPPERMILL, VIRGINIAN

***I** N OCTOBER OF 1988 you resigned from the Horseshoe?*

I went to work for Josh Ketchum in October of 1988. I had given my resignation to Mr. Mason earlier, and I think I touched on that before, that I had told him in late August or September that I was going to leave, and he had asked me not to say anything about it until October. The Horseshoe, of course, really wasn't doing that good at all, as I mentioned earlier. We just were too short of money to operate. It just so happened about that time that Josh Ketchum had signed a lease with the Ponderosa Hotel, which was owned at that time by Bob Rusk and Joe Keshmiri. They had gone out looking for someone to lease their gambling area, and they had come in contact with Josh Ketchum. Josh Ketchum's father was named Charles Ketchum, and Josh's real name is Charles Josh Ketchum IX. Charles Josh Ketchum VIII, his father, was a developer and a contractor who worked with an ex-partner of mine, Everett Brunzell. They had owned the K & B Construction Company. So when Josh Ketchum turned twenty-one, Everett Brunzell came to me in the Silver Spur and said,

“Would you help break in Josh Ketchum on dealing and keno and familiarize him with the casino business?”

Naturally, I said, “Yes.” I was general manager of the Silver Spur at that time, and I hired Josh Ketchum in keno. He worked in the keno department for just a few months, and it was basically just to give him exposure to the casino business. So then we took him into the pit, and we taught him to deal twenty-one, craps, and roulette and to work in the pit area, and naturally, we spent a lot more personal time with him, because his father was such a dear friend and partner of Everett Brunzell. Then, when his father was not able to get licensed at the Crystal Bay Club, Josh was licensed as a 30 percent plus owner of the Crystal Bay Club. He had two sisters that were licensed for a few points at the Crystal Bay, but Josh was the largest shareholder—still is the largest shareholder of the Crystal Bay Club at North Shore.

The Crystal Bay Club had approximately twenty-three owners, but they operated on the basis of one man, one vote. So even though Josh owned over 30 percent of the club, he didn't really have that much to do with the running of the club. Josh, at that time, was in his early twenties, and he decided that he wanted to run his own casino. So that's how he happened to get the lease at the Ponderosa Hotel. Josh's memory went back to when he'd gone to work for me at the Silver Spur, and he liked the way that I had operated a casino, so he wanted me to be the general manager of the Ponderosa.

He didn't offer me much money. I don't remember what it was. It was a small amount of money, maybe, like twenty thousand dollars a year, but with the understanding that after we got licensed, and after we were operating in a profitable situation, he would give me 3 percent of the Ponderosa gaming. So that was the big carrot in front of my nose, to once again be a small percentage owner of a casino. I was ready to get out of the Horseshoe, anyhow, so when Josh made me that offer, I just thought it was great. I told Mr. Mason in September that I was going to leave, and in October I gave my final notice, left the Horseshoe, and then went to work for Josh, getting the Ponderosa ready and getting it set up to open, hiring people, buying supplies, and just doing everything in conjunction with Josh. Josh was a

hands-on owner, also—very, very hands-on. He liked to be involved in everything. Josh and I worked together quite a bit on getting it open. The biggest problem with Josh in the Ponderosa Hotel was that, there again, he went into it with a short bankroll. We had a tremendous amount of expenses, naturally, getting a place open and buying all the casino supplies. We also had the bar and the restaurant, and we had to completely redecorate the restaurant. We started serving lunches in the Ponderosa, probably, in November 1988, and we actually were losing money in the restaurant before the club got open. So the money was going out pretty fast. We had to buy tokens, we had to buy the chips, we had to buy all the bar supplies, food supplies, and we had hoped on getting on the December agenda and getting licensed and being ready to open in January. That got put off and put off, and we finally got on the February agenda, and so we opened in March of 1989.

By the February agenda, you mean the agenda of the Gaming Commission?

Of the Gaming Control Board and the Gaming Commission, yes.

How large was the Ponderosa? How many slot machines? How many table games were there?

We opened with one hundred slot machines, three twenty-ones, and no craps or keno.

How did that feel to you? You were used to keno being a big performer.

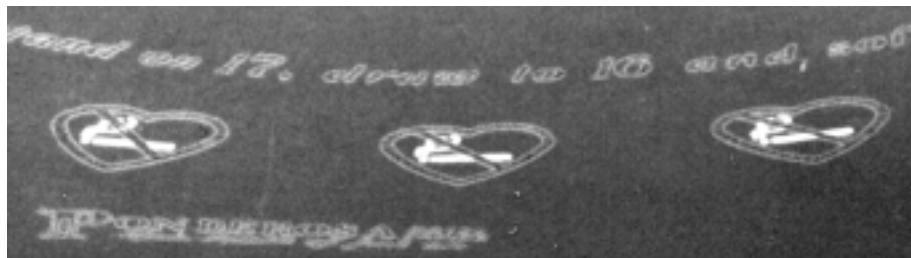
We felt we didn't have the bankroll to open a keno game. We leased a portion of our slot machines. I don't recall the exact amount.

One thing we had no trouble with was finding employees to work there. We were almost inundated with applications of people that wanted to work there to get into that smoke-free

atmosphere.¹ There's hundreds of casino employees that really don't like that second-hand smoke, but there's nothing they can do about it. So we pretty much had our pick of who we wanted to hire. I hired a fellow named Gordon Drendel as my assistant and the slot manager at the Ponderosa. We brought down a girl named Misty Ricketts to work for us. She had worked in the Horseshoe and Silver Spur, and she did a little bit of everything. She was a cashier and a credit manager and a slot change booth cashier, and so she helped us a lot. In the restaurant I hired Bill Behymer. He'd worked with me in the Horseshoe all the time that I was there. The bar manager, the fellow I wanted to get, was a fellow named Jim Horn, but he smoked so heavily that he couldn't come to work down there. [laughter] He didn't want to give up his smoking to go to work for us. So I started out in the bar with a fellow named Tommy Thompson. Plenty of dealers applied for work there, and plenty of shift supervisors. So our biggest problem was, once again, a short bankroll; we didn't have enough money to really operate.

Did you know how large his bankroll was when you started?

Yes, \$600,000 is what we had to work with. We knew it was going to be tough. We delayed payments as much as we could, but we were almost busted. We'd almost gone through that \$600,000 by the time we got the club open. The big fallacy is that when you hear about or read about the Ponderosa failing, they always say it was because it was a non-smoking casino. That part is not true at all. There were a few problems because of that, but the basic



The layout on the twenty-one tables at the Ponderosa included no-smoking, heart symbols.

reason that that club never got off the ground was that Josh didn't have a big enough bankroll to get it going and keep it going. One big thing about it was we didn't have a customer base. We were capable of building our own customer base. It wasn't like Harrah's or Harolds or the Nevada Club all of a sudden decided they were going to be non-smoking. They had a huge customer base that already were smokers. We didn't have to worry about that—we weren't *losing* anyone. We were just starting from ground up. So that was a real plus for us, that we could have built our own customer base.

It was a problem trying to bring buses into the Ponderosa, because so many of the bus people were smokers, and no one was allowed to smoke in the building, nowhere in the entire building. So if we got a bus with forty people, and ten or twenty or all of them were smokers, we had a problem. We had told the bus operators up-front that we didn't allow smoking, but still they would bring in buses that did have smokers on them. Then the smokers would become very irritated when they found out that they couldn't smoke, and they would automatically start lighting up and smoking in the slot area or in the twenty-one area, so we would have to stop them, and that didn't go over too good. We had a hard time bringing buses in there.

We had another problem because we did not own the hotel rooms. The hotel rooms were owned by Rusk and Keshmiri, and if we wanted to bring in a group of good players, or if we wanted to comp a room or give a room to a good customer, we had to pay actual cash to Rusk and Keshmiri, cash out of our pocket. In a regular hotel-casino it's a complimentary item, and no actual cash is taken out of the casino's pocket to pay for that hotel room. Here is another problem—this is nothing against Rusk and Keshmiri—they were doing their best to operate a hotel, but on occasions they would get almost the entire amount of rooms rented out to youth groups. One time there was a high school swimming meet in Reno, and they rented out a hundred or more rooms to these underaged, high-school swimmers. Another time the entire hotel was rented out to a religious group, and, of course, they didn't drink or gamble, either one. So Rusk and Keshmiri were happy, because they had all their hotel rooms sold, and they had a good

cash flow situation, whereas we were not getting any play out of the people that were staying in the hotel rooms. So that was a major problem for us.

You started with no bankroll?

Started pretty slim, yes.

How did you do through the summer?

We did OK during the summer. We made a few dollars in April, May, June, and July. We were going all right. We weren't coining the money, but when we started getting into October, November, the bankroll was very short again, *very* short. We were behind in several payments to all kinds of purveyors and to different organizations and different government departments. We were having trouble paying the gaming taxes. By that time I had worked there almost a year. I had worked awfully hard getting the place open, worked a lot of long hours for it, and I could not see the place being a success. As early as October, November, I figured this place is not going to make it, and I still wasn't making any large salary. I was still probably making about twenty thousand dollars a year, and that part didn't bother me. I could have worked another year or two at that salary level *if* I knew the place would have been a success, but all I could see was it going downhill. There was no way it was going to make it, because we didn't have enough money to really keep it going. So I left the Ponderosa, then, in November of 1989. The club kept on doing poorly, and they actually closed on March 1 of 1990. It was open a year to a day when they closed the gaming down, and Josh was out of there.

Did they ever put gambling back in?

No, they never did. They leased a few slot machines from a slot route operator, so they did have slot machines in there for a short time. Right now I don't think they have any gambling at all in there. I haven't been in the place for a couple of years, but one portion of it is a gentlemen's club with topless dancers.

Could you give us a brief history of the Ponderosa?

The Ponderosa Hotel opened in November of 1966, and the gambling opened in April of 1967. The six owners of the Ponderosa when it very first opened were Conrad Priess, Jake Gastanega, Eugene Gastanega, José Gastanega, Everett Brunzell, and a gentleman named Larry Tripp. Those were the people originally licensed at the Ponderosa Hotel. It opened with about 265 rooms. From the day the place opened there was conflict between Mr. Tripp, who had a wife named Kathy, and the rest of the owners. So finally in late 1969 the owners had a meeting, and the Priess, Gastanega, and Brunzell group said to Mr. Tripp and his wife, "Either you buy us out, or we're going to buy you out. We'll arrive at a price, and one or the other of us is going to get out of here." So the wind-up is Mr. and Mrs. Tripp bought the Ponderosa.

They operated it until June of 1980 when the gaming was closed down by the Nevada Gaming Commission, because they had too many violations in their accounting procedures. The Gaming Control Board had told them that if they didn't comply more with the regulations and procedures that they were going to close it down. A gentleman named Jack Stratton was chairman of the Gaming Control Board in those days. At this time Mr. Tripp was fairly old, probably was in his eighties, and Kathy Tripp, his wife, was the general manager of the club. The NGCB [Nevada Gaming Control Board] told Kathy Tripp, "Get your books in order, or we'll close you down." When she failed to comply with their request, in June of 1980 the gaming part of the Ponderosa was closed down, and a few months later the entire operation was closed down.

Between 1980 and 1988 there were various owners at the Ponderosa Hotel that tried to put in gaming. The fellow that was there the longest was named George Prock. When George Prock died there wasn't gaming again until Josh Ketchum opened it in 1989. Keshmiri and Rusk had bought the property probably in April of 1988, but neither one of them were ever involved in any gaming.

And to kind of close it out, now Rusk is no longer a partner, and Keshmiri owns it himself?

Correct. The entire property is owned by Joe Keshmiri now. I still think it was a good property, and if we'd had more money, it would have been a really good situation, because we had so much ground level parking. You look at it now, you look at the clubs that have done well like the Atlantis, Boomtown, Sparks Nugget, Peppermill—they have a lot of ground level parking, and I think that's a big attraction.

We were a little bit off the beaten path—not a little bit—we were about five blocks too far south. That was another of our problems: we didn't get any foot traffic. Nobody was walking by, but we could have overcome that, eventually.

So you think if you had a bankroll to operate long enough you'd have built a customer base of non-smokers?

Yes, we definitely would have. I think it would have been a huge success, and, as I said earlier, the sad part about it is when everybody says, "Well, it didn't make it because it was non-smoking." That really had very little to do with it.

This now makes, depending on how you describe it, two or three times that in the last part of your career you're in the same place: the club didn't have enough money to operate. How did you feel about that by this time?

It was very frustrating. At the Silver Spur we had enough money, so that we weren't hindered in our operation. The Silver Spur revenue dropped, but we weren't hindered. It was very depressing and frustrating at the Horseshoe and the Ponderosa. Plus another thing, a lot of people around town and people in the gaming business, when they hear, "Well, Dwayne was there when the Horseshoe closed," which, actually, it was closed shortly after I left, or "Dwayne was there when," and the Ponderosa closed later. Some people even thought it was my fault.

You feel bad for the employees that are put out of work and you feel bad for your own reputation, because people start to say,

“Well, Dwayne went to work there, and it closed.” In my own mind I realize that there’s really nothing I could have done in any of those places to keep them going any longer than they did, but I feel bad that I was there when a couple of them went down.

We talked about other people’s goals when they started a casino, and we talked about the investors who just wanted a return. The Smiths wanted to build a business. They wanted a place to work. They certainly wanted an income from it, but others probably just said, “We’re going to make money, and then we’ll sell it.” What were you thinking when you started with the Ponderosa? What were you thinking it was going to be for you?

I felt the Ponderosa was going to be there forever. I felt I had another opportunity to become an owner. At that time I was, oh, probably in my late fifties, and I felt that it would be something that I could work on for the rest of my life. If I became a part owner of it, then I would always have someplace to work, and it was a retirement for me, in a way. So I was looking towards the long-range future for me. I felt that it would be a success. Naturally, if I didn’t feel it would have been a success, I wouldn’t have gone down there.

You resigned from the Ponderosa in October of 1989. Where did you go then?

Well, at that time I was going to get out of the gambling business. I wrote a few letters, talked to a few people about staying in, and then I thought, “Well, I’ll get out for awhile.” So I went to work with a company called Desert Hills Electric. They’re a surveillance company. It’s owned by a group of young fellows. James Harrison and Mike Harrison are brothers, and Brian Poynter works with them, also. I’d become acquainted with them in the Horseshoe Club. I’d used their equipment, and I’d helped them get their equipment into several casinos around town and at Lake Tahoe, most noticeably the Hyatt Hotel-Casino at Lake Tahoe. So James Harrison, who is the president of the corporation, and I thought that we would make a good team. He could use me for counseling, and, of course, I knew a lot of people

in the business, and I talked to a lot of general managers at different places. I stayed with Desert Hills for about six months, and it worked out well. In fact, to this day I'm still associated with Desert Hills, still work with them on various projects. They've expanded now. They're into Louisiana and Mississippi, and they have an office in Mississippi, as well as an office in Sparks.

Then in March of 1990, I went to the Peppermill Casino. My wife, Rose, was working at the Silver Club dealing a little bit of twenty-one at that time. She hadn't worked as a dealer for several years, but when I went to work at the Ponderosa, then she went to work dealing twenty-one at the Silver Club for a friend of hers named Cliff Wyatt. The Silver Club wasn't a very good place to work at that time, so she left the Silver Club, and we thought, "Well, we'll go see Phil Bryan at the Peppermill." We walked into the Peppermill with the idea of Rose getting a job there, and when I talked to Phil, Phil says, "Well, why don't you come to work here?" The windup is Rose didn't go to work there, and I did. I just worked part-time; on an average week I worked about three nights a week.

I worked at the Peppermill for about fourteen to fifteen months on swing shift. Jim Fisher was the swing shift manager, and his number two man was P.J. Connelly. Like I say, I didn't really want to work more than two, three days a week. It was a different experience for me, because it was the first time that I'd ever been involved with a computer system. They had a computer tracking system in the pit then, and I had never done that before. Tracking was a big thing at the Peppermill. Tracking means keeping a record of the customers' action: how long he played, what his average bet was, what his buy-in was, how much he won, his average bet on a twenty-one game, or his average bet on the crap table. All these things were recorded on a tracking card by the pit floor men, and then a pit clerk would enter the data on the computer in the pit. That was a new experience for me.

What did you think of it?

There are weaknesses in it. I guess there's weaknesses to any tracking system. One of the weaknesses was in the pai gow pit.

Everybody would make huge buy-ins. They'd buy in five thousand dollars or ten thousand dollars, and then they would sit there and bet five hundred dollars on high and five hundred dollars on low, and they were getting a lot of action on their money, but the club really wasn't winning that much money from them, but if you'd look at their card, they had large buy-ins, and that's what so much of your complimentary hotel rooms and complimentary food and beverage was based on—your buy-ins and your average bet. So the pai gow bets would make a player look like he was a better customer than he actually was.

Then, another thing that happened was they had marketing people that would bring in small groups of people or medium-sized groups of people. Then the marketing people would, I guess you could use the word “fudge”, on the amount of play that they got out of their players, because they were rewarded in some way through a bonus system based on what kind of action their players gave the Peppermill. Fallacious figures were created oftentimes, not only by the casino hosts, but by the casino pit bosses.

What incentive was there for the casino pit boss not to put down accurate figures?

Pit bosses were also awarded points for the type of play that their customer generated. Say a customer came in the club that didn't “belong” to anybody; he didn't come in with a junket; he had never been in the club and had never been established as a player. You could get his name and address and enter him in the computer as “your” player. Then whenever that customer played, you were given bonus points based on his play. The points could be used for free dinners and other prizes.

What was your main responsibility at the Peppermill?

My main responsibility as a pit floor man there was to visit with the customers, talk with the customers, make them feel happy, and make them feel welcome. It reminded me of Harolds Club in that way, because when I worked there it was about as happy and friendly a place as any I'd ever worked in, next to

Harolds Club. The players were all having a good time. The dealers were all having a good time. There was a tremendous amount of communication between the player and the dealer and also the pit supervisor. Whenever a player came to the table, you would introduce yourself, talk to him, give him your business card and ask, "Have you ever been here before? Have you played here?"

"No, I haven't ever played here, but I'm sure having a good time." Then you would get his name and address, fill out a card on him, and enter his name in the computer. The next time he came in he would be tracked by someone.

Were you encouraged to invite the players back?

Oh, definitely. You were encouraged to do that. It was a great marketing system. I'll give Phil Bryan 100 percent credit for that. He was the greatest marketing person that I ever saw, as far as bringing people in and encouraging his supervisors to take care of the customers.

Were there any other problems with the tracking system?

Another problem with the marketing or the tracking system was that there were a lot of floor men that worked together on rating their players. Just say, for example, if one of your players came in, you would come to me and say, "Would you raise the buy-in, raise the average bet, raise the rating of *my* customer?" because that benefited you, and then when my customers came in, you would give them exaggerated ratings.

And specifically someone would ask for that?

Some pit bosses specifically asked, yes, and some casino hosts explicitly asked.

You've been a general manager, you've been licensed, you've been an owner. How did that practice at the Peppermill make you feel?

I thought it was basically dishonest. It's nothing you're going to go to jail for, but it certainly reflects on your character and your honesty.

Didn't it make you wonder if in the past some of your shift managers and your pit bosses had worked together to do the same thing? And didn't it make you distrust people when you saw what they would do for a free meal?

I never had a tracking system in any place that I ever worked for before. It was a different experience to me, so I can't really compare with anyone that ever worked for me. I know there's always a lot of free meals given out in casinos, and they aren't necessarily given out to players—they're given out to their friends or relatives. The phrase that Arkie Parker used—and I've used it dozens of times since—was, "Well, he made himself a hero on my money."

In other words, the pit boss would buy these free meals or give free drinks to these people, and everybody said, "Oh, Joe's really a nice guy. Joe bought my dinner. Joe's really great." Well, Joe is spending Arkie Parker's money or spending the Silver Spur money and making himself look good and making him look like a hero with somebody else's money.

I remember telling a few pit bosses, "You know, if you think this guy is such a good player, take him over to your house. Feed him with your food at your house, because I don't think he's that good a player, so I don't want you feeding him on my money," because in the Silver Spur, of course, I did wind up being an owner, but anytime I was casino manager or general manager I always felt it was my money, because I was responsible for it, and so I looked at it as if it were mine, whether it was mine or not. I know people are always going to fudge like that a little bit, but it can be carried to extremes.

What did you say to somebody when they asked you to do something like that?

I didn't tell them I wouldn't do it. I just pretty much kind of ignored it, and I didn't really care if they built up my players or not. I never asked anybody to build up my players, because I didn't have that many players. I was only working two or three nights a week, so I didn't have that much of a player following, plus, it was just a day-to-day job to me, and if somebody said something to me that I didn't have enough players or not enough points, I didn't worry about it. I did not go to Phil Bryan and tell him what was going on, and I did not go to Jim Fisher or anyone else and ever report it, but I can't help but feel that they were cognizant of what was happening.

How long did you stay at the Peppermill?

I stayed about a year and a half. I think I started work there in March and left in June of the following year.

Why did you finally leave?

Because of a long-time friend of mine, a fellow I've known since high school days named Milt Manoukian. Milt was an attorney in the Reno-Lake Tahoe area for many years. He's retired now, but he was an attorney for the George Karadanis family. George Karadanis is the major owner of the Sundowner Hotel, and George's son, Matt Karadanis, was the co-owner and general manager of the Virginian Hotel-Casino. Matt had happened to have lunch with Milt about two or three days after Milt and I had lunch one day, and Matt said to Milt Manoukian, "I'm looking for a casino manager. Do you know of anybody that would come down here and run the Virginian for me? I've had trouble ever since it's been open; I've never found anybody that I was happy with."

Milt says, "Well, I know someone that might be interested." So Milt called me and said, "Would you be interested?"

Getting back to what I said earlier, I thought, "Yes, I would like to do that. I would like to get back into a casino manager's job, run the casino full-time and maybe work a few years and go out on top." I had been offered the general manager's job at the Biltmore

on the north shore of Lake Tahoe by Conrad Priess, one of the owners of the Biltmore. He wanted me to go up there and run it, because he'd been happy with what I did at the Silver Spur, but at that stage in my life I didn't feel like making a move to the north shore of Lake Tahoe, and it was too far to commute. I felt the only way you could really operate as a general manager was to be on the property a lot, and you can't be driving sixty miles one way to go to work, so I turned that job down, but I did consider the Virginian job.

So Milt called Matt and said that Dwayne would be interested in talking to him about it. We met at Hidden Valley Country Club and had lunch there, and Matt and I hit it off right off the bat. He was a younger fellow. Matt is probably about forty now, so he was maybe thirty-five or something at that time, and he liked baseball, and I liked baseball, and we got along really well, so I said that I would take the job as a casino manager, and I started in as casino manager in the summer of 1992.

Do you have a brief history of the Virginian?

The Virginian opened in 1988 with one hundred hotel rooms. It had gaming on the first floor and a restaurant on the third floor. The second floor, at one time, had table games, but most of the time the Virginian was open the second floor had only slots and a bar, and that was about it, but on the first floor, when I came to work, we had ten twenty-one games, a crap, and a wheel. There was also a keno game and about five hundred slot machines. I was called casino manager, but basically I was a pit manager; I was in charge of the pit only. I had nothing to do with the slots. Shouldn't say I had nothing to do with it, but I was not responsible for the slots or the keno.

Who built the Virginian?

The Karadanis Construction Company built the Virginian. The Karadanis's main field is construction. They built the Sundowner, of course. They built the Virginian. They built probably a half a dozen motels at Lake Tahoe or maybe more.

They built motels all over northern California. They own parts of at least thirty-five Wendy's restaurants. They built dozens of homes in the San Rafael Park area. They built warehouses all over northern California and Nevada. So construction was really their main business. That's how they got into the casino business in the first place. George Karadanis built the Sundowner in 1975, and it was the largest hotel-casino in Reno when they opened. They had 250 rooms when they opened, and they, of course, have added onto it since then. Karadanis built the hotel with the idea of selling it to someone else, but then he was convinced by someone to keep it and open it up as a hotel-casino.

Then did they build the Virginian because they were so successful at the Sundowner, and they wanted another property?

I'm not positive of that, but George Karadanis had purchased that property from some of the Cal-Neva group. I know when he was going to build the Virginian—it's almost directly across the street from what was the Onslow Hotel, now the Riverboat—Everett Brunzell, one of the owners of the Onslow, said to George, "I'll sell you the Onslow for less than what it's going to cost you to build the Virginian." [laughter]

And George told Everett, "No." He said, "I'd rather build a hotel. I'd rather build one than buy one." [laughter] One of the problems with the Virginian is that it is very narrow and very tall. They had a very small space to build the hotel. Parking was also a problem with the Virginian. You had to pull into the alley and drive your car into a elevator-like contraption. Then your car would be lifted in the elevator up to the parking level, and it was hard to park that way. When the hotel customers were unloading in the alley, the delivery trucks and the garbage trucks were coming by, and if the valet kids weren't right on top of it, you couldn't get your car into the elevator or get it out again. Parking was always a problem at the Virginian.

How long did you work there?

I worked there full-time for a little over a year, and we made a certain amount of progress. We weren't really breaking any records, but we did OK there for awhile. I was a working casino manager. I worked two shifts on swing shift as the shift manager, and I worked a couple of shifts on day shift as a shift manager, and one day a week doing paperwork or purchasing or ordering or going through personnel records, things of that nature. So it was a little over a year, and one day I was thinking about leaving, and Matt came down and said, "Well, how you doing, Dwayne? How you getting along?"

I said, "Well, you know, I was just thinking about talking to you." I said, "I think I'm about ready to retire." I said, "It's been fun working here, and I had a good time working here. I think we've made progress, but I would like to give you my resignation."

So it was kind of ironic. It was like the Horseshoe when I told Mason that I wanted to quit the first time. He said, "Oh, would you stay on as an advisor?" So Matt asked me the same thing. He said, "Would you stay on in the Virginian? Not work full-time, just come in and kind of keep an eye on things for me," because Matt was not a hands-on general manager. He did not spend a lot of time there. He felt that if I were there just to walk in and look at things or keep him posted on things that it would be good. So I did that for probably another year and a half. I would go in at least four or five times a week, but not for any length of time. I might go in just for an hour or two. Go in and talk to customers, or go in and talk to the dealers, and just kind of keep an eye on things. I would always meet with Matt once or twice a week. We'd have lunch, and we'd talk about things. Then in 1995 Matt decided to retire from the Virginian. He was only about thirty-eight years old, but he was going to get out of the casino business. So he asked me then if I wanted to take over as general manager and run the entire property, and I said, "No, I didn't care to do that."

So he wound up hiring a fellow named Lee DeLauer as general manager of the club. I'd known Lee since 1947, when we had played semi-pro baseball together in Reno. Lee asked me to stay on and continue the job that I was doing, but I told Lee that I just would feel more comfortable if I just retired completely out of the

Virginian, so that's what I did in September of 1995. Also, I was sixty-five then, so it tied in with me retiring from the gaming business.

Did the Virginian teach you anything? Was there anything different about the Virginian experience?

No, the Virginian didn't really teach me anything. It just really confirmed the fact that the gambling business, as a whole, is much different now than it was when I had first started out. Much of it is the dealer's attitude, as far as loyalty to the job. The dealers at the Virginian kept their own tokens. I blame, not the owners of the Virginian or the Sundowner, but the casino owners in general. The casino pay is so low that you have a lot of dealers that have been dealing for years, still getting minimum wage. So I think the casino owners, by keeping their wages low, have hurt themselves in the long-run, because they don't develop any loyalty in people. One of the main things the dealers are concerned with now is how much are the tokens, and do you go for your own tokens, or do you split your tokens, and how much money are they making on graveyard, or how much money are they making on day shift? I know a couple of years ago the Eldorado dealers started keeping their own tokens. It's a very tough scheduling situation because, naturally, there's a lot of tables that make more tokens than the other tables do, so how do you fairly assign those dealers to those tables? At Harolds Club it never was a problem. The dealers at the Virginian kept their own tokens, and, of course, at the Peppermill the dealers all split their tokens, so that wasn't a problem, but in the Virginian you had to be so careful and keep track of where the dealers had worked, so that it was fair to everyone. Dealers would draw for specific tables, but tables such as roulette and the dice table didn't make many tokens, so everyone had to take their turn.



To go back a little, you went to the Peppermill to get a job for Rose from Phil Bryan, which means you knew Phil personally. Can you tell us where you met him?

I met Phil probably in about 1964 or 1965. I was working as a floor man on swing shift at Harolds Club, and I was doing the

dealers' schedule. Phil was either just completing the University of Nevada or, possibly, still going to the University of Nevada, and he was working as a cook in the Harolds Club restaurant. He was married to a lady that was dealing twenty-one on swing shift. So Phil would come down every week and tell me what days off he was going to have and ask me if I could work out the schedule so that he and his wife Joan would have the same nights off. Of course, I was very happy to oblige. Part of Harolds Club tradition then was trying to make it convenient for people that worked on the same shift to get the same days off. Then, over the years I would run into Phil at different meetings, at different gaming association meetings, or different get-togethers, so I stayed in touch with Phil. Phil and I were never close friends and never had much of a working arrangement, but I knew he had hired several people from Harolds Club when he was chief executive officer of the Peppermill. So that's why we went down to the Peppermill, to find a job for Rose. Phil is a good example of how so many people have advanced in the gaming business. He started out as a cook and wound up being general manager, chief executive officer of at least three major casinos.

Was it common for the husband to negotiate the schedule for the wife?

Negotiate might not be the right word, but it was very common for the husband to make the scheduling person *aware* of what days off he was going to have. We would do the same thing, whether the spouse was working at Harolds Club or Harrah's or the Cal-Neva or wherever. Their schedules might change weekly, and we always bent over backwards to try and accommodate married couples.

You were going to say some summary things about your career. Would you also say something about changes in the gaming industry?

I started out, as I mentioned earlier, as a change apron, and I wound up being co-owner of a major casino on Virginia Street, and I felt that was quite an accomplishment. That's one of the

things I'm proudest of in my life, as far as my career is concerned. I feel that I reached that goal because I set a goal. When I first started out carrying change, my goal was to become a dealer, and then from there I wanted to be a pit boss, and as I advanced in the gaming industry I set new goals, and my final goal was to become a casino owner. I feel that you have to set goals, and if you don't set goals in life, you're never going to attain anything.

When I first went into the gaming industry, most people that worked in the gaming industry were not respected as much as they are today, and they weren't thought to be as much a part of the community as they are today. When we moved into this neighborhood in 1967, thirty-one years ago, we found out that we were categorized as casino employees. At that time we were probably one of the few casino families living in this area, and they expected us to drag in three or four broken-down, used cars and let our yards go to a state of disrepair and let our house become run-down, because we were "casino people." Now casino people are, in many cases, highly thought of in the community. Chief executive officers, middle management, and upper management people are active throughout the city of Reno and throughout the state of Nevada. That's the biggest accomplishment that the casino employees have made. I think the casinos, when I first started out, paid what was at that time a good living wage. I think now that casino wages have not kept up with the cost of inflation, and that's the main reason why the dealers or any of the employees aren't as conscientious and aren't as loyal as they were in the early days. They feel that the casino has not been fair to them, so in most cases they aren't fair to the employers. I don't mean they're dishonest or anything; I just mean that their work attitudes, their work ethics are different. There again, I must interject that I think the work ethics in just about any industry have declined in the last forty years.

Has the customer changed?

Customers have changed, because they've become more spoiled. Years ago, if a customer received even a free drink, it was considered a bonus. If they got free meals, it was a real bonus

situation for them. Now the casinos, I think, have hurt themselves, because they have started competing with each other on what they will give to the customer to get him into their casino. What started out as a free drink has now become free hotel stays for a week at a time or free dinners and free shows. I think it's hurt the industry, because it's hard to get a good bottom line in a casino when you're spending so much money to get that customer there and to keep him there. The customers also do not have the loyalty that the customers had in years past. We mentioned earlier that people would come to Reno and the only club they would play in would be Harolds Club. Now the customers have become the same way as the dealers. If they get a free meal at the Cal-Neva, they'll go to the Cal-Neva. If they get a nicer meal at the Peppermill, they'll go out to the Peppermill. So the customer, in a lot of cases, is looking to see how he can upgrade his benefits.

How have the casinos changed in the last forty years?

Well, the biggest thing is that the twenty-one games have become such a dominant part of the pit. The ratio of crap games and twenty-one games has changed tremendously, and the roulette game has become almost a dying game. Some casinos have one or two roulette tables, depending on the size of their pit, more as a necessary evil than anything else. So the biggest change up until about 1988 was the fact that the twenty-ones have become so dominant. In the last, say, ten years or so, different types of games have created some differences in the pit. You have games like "let it ride," royal match games, and pai gow. Also, a game that gets play in a lot of casinos is Caribbean stud. The new games were brought about by the fact that the pit revenues were going down. People weren't playing the pit; they were putting more money into the slot machines, so some of the casinos tried to get new games in the pit that are similar to slot machines. Actually, I think it's a little too soon to make a judgement on the new games, although they've had some of these games in for a fair amount of years. They still haven't stood the test of time, and there are changes even now in the pit; they keep bringing in different games and trying different ideas. There have been

several different types of dice games that have been tried, and none of them have ever really been successful, and the slots have become an even more dominant part of gaming revenue. Another game that has declined a great deal is the keno game. There's nowhere near the revenue in a keno game that there used to be years ago. I wouldn't be surprised if keno is phased out, eventually.

Do you think the Silver Spur may have had the last great keno game?

Yes, I'm sure that, per square foot, we wrote more keno tickets than any club in history. I always hark back to that figure of a \$7 million write. To write \$7 million worth of keno tickets in those days was probably more than anybody, except maybe Harolds, Harrah's, and Cal-Neva.

Why do you think Reggie Parker was more successful at Warren Nelson's game—keno—than Warren was? He took Warren's ideas, but he was better at it in the end than Warren was.

I never worked with Warren Nelson, and I wasn't around Warren Nelson, so I don't know how close he kept his eye on the keno game. He had other department managers, of course, as did Reggie Parker, but Reggie, even though he was general manager, didn't really concern himself about the pit when I was casino manager. He didn't worry about the slots, either, when he had a fellow named Jimmy Gore as slot manager, but he would *always* be concerned with the keno game. First thing he always would check would be the keno write and the keno win and check everything that was happening in keno. So I think he stayed more on top of the keno game than Warren had the time or the inclination to do. Reggie financially rewarded his keno manager and his keno shift supervisors, and he kept the best writers in his keno game. So, in summarizing it, I'd say that Reggie stayed on top of it more than Warren did.

The slots became dominant, the table games became smaller, craps became less popular, keno became less popular. Any other changes?

Well, I think that about covers it all. Slots, of course, became more and more dominant, because there's so many more chances to win a million dollars or more in the slots than there are anywhere else. You're never going to make the instant money in the pit or the keno like you can on a slot machine, so I think that slots will continue to grow and continue to dominate in the years ahead. I think another thing that has changed a lot is the fact that either accountants or attorneys are becoming the executives and general managers of the gaming industry.

Also, the pit boss type of person or the pit boss *image* has changed a great deal. For the last several years the pit boss has become more of a marketing person. They aren't as concerned with observing the games, looking for cheaters, or looking for things that are going wrong on the game. A lot of the casinos have turned the business of watching the games over to surveillance departments, and I don't necessarily think that's right, but it does depend on the strength of the surveillance person, and it depends on the strength of the pit person. When you go into a pit nowadays the big concern of the pit floor man, in most cases, is to keep the customer happy and to keep a rapport going between the customer and the dealers and the employees of the club.

Another big thing that's changed in the gaming industry is the fact that there are so many female supervisors now. When I started in the business in the 1950s, of course, there were no female supervisors. There had been female supervisors, especially in Harolds Club, during the war when there was such a male shortage, but after World War II was over there weren't many women supervisors in the pit area. Now there's been several lady general managers, and there's a lot of lady pit supervisors, shift managers, and casino managers. That was a big change.

Another big change in the casinos is the fact that there are many more Oriental people working in the pits than there used to

be. When I first started out I don't recall any Oriental people working at all, except in keno.

The one big thing that hasn't changed is the fact that most casinos still advertise their food as the best and the least expensive, and a lot of them hang their advertising hat on food. John Ascuaga's Nugget is famous for hanging its hat on food, but everyone does it. Cal-Neva advertises two-for-one prime rib dinners, the least expensive prime rib in town. The Peppermill had their Le Moulin restaurant. Many of them have buffets, and every year someone is proud to boast or advertise that they have the best buffet in Reno. Restaurants first came into the casino business in the late 1940s, and the Nevada Club was the first casino to have a restaurant. In the late 1940s and early 1950s places like Jim Kelly's Nugget advertised their food, and the Nevada Club advertised their food. As the restaurants became more popular in the casino business, everyone advertised their food, and that's one thing that has not changed at all.

Is there anything else about the changes in the industry that you would care to comment on?

There's probably other ones, but right at this moment I can't think of anything. Entertainment is one big thing that was almost non-existent when I started, and then reached a tremendous peak, and then a few years ago was pretty much phased out, and now is starting to rebound a little bit. Years ago there would be small groups playing in many of the night clubs. They weren't casinos; they were more of a cabaret type of operation. They would have dances or dance bands and singers to bring customers in. Some of the famous ones in the early days were the Willows, the New York Club, the Doghouse, the Inferno. They would all have entertainment to bring people in to dine and dance and, of course, gamble when they were there. Harrah's Club brought it up to the peak with their top-name entertainers, and then it dropped down to where entertainment wasn't that big, but now casinos are, once again, starting to bring in entertainment. The Silver Legacy now brings in big entertainers on the weekend. Ascuaga's

Nugget brings in big-name entertainers. Even the Peppermill and the Atlantis are starting to bring in well-known entertainers. I think it's been recognized in the last few years that entertainment was one thing that Reno was lacking. So there has been a noticeable increase in entertainment in the last few years.

Do you want to talk some more about your family?

Well, my family has been an important part of my life. My first daughter, Michelle, was born May 8, 1953 in Oakland, California, and my second daughter, Connie, was born in Reno, Nevada, on October 28, 1954. When Michelle was born I was in Boise, Idaho, playing baseball, so I wasn't there for her birth. When Connie was born I was carrying change on graveyard in Harolds Club, and the



Rose Kling in December 1996 with four of the Kling grandchildren. Clockwise from top, Nic Wisecarver, Rose Kling, Jenny Luna, Chad Zamora, and Scott Zamora.

cashier got a phone call from my wife saying that she felt she was going to have the baby. I took off work and drove back to our house, and my wife, Eugenia, took a cab to St. Mary's Hospital where Connie was born. I stayed home with Michelle, who was about seventeen months old at the time. So those are my two daughters, Michelle and Connie.

In 1967 I married my wife, Rose. She has a daughter named Debbie. So we have three daughters, Michelle, Connie, and Debbie, Debbie being



Grandson Nic Wisecarver, United States Naval Academy Class of 2000.



Granddaughter Allison Zamora.

the youngest one. Debbie was born August 17, 1961. She was born here in Reno, Nevada. Rose and I now have been married thirty-one years. Connie has never married, but Michelle has been married twice. She has a son, Nicolas Wisecarver, who is in the Naval Academy. She also has a daughter named Jenny Luna who is eleven years old. Debbie has a son, Scott Zamora, who is eleven years old, another son named Chad who will

be six in December, and they have a daughter named Allison who was born May 12, 1997, so she's just a little one. I think a family is an important part of anyone's life, and my family has been an important part of my life.

Note

1. The Ponderosa Hotel-Casino was the first full-scale gaming establishment to be entirely non-smoking.

EPILOGUE

UPON RETIREMENT from the gaming industry in 1995, I became focused on completing a manuscript that would record the history of gambling in Reno from 1931 to 1981. One day while doing research at the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP), I became involved in a discussion with Dr. R. T. King, the program's director. He sensed my love of the history of gaming and soon asked me if I would be interested in meeting with Ken Adams, the gaming history coordinator for the UNOHP. After meeting with Ken and receiving training in the theory and practice of oral history, I became an associate of the UNOHP in 1997.

This was the beginning of an entirely new and exciting life for me. I had always wanted to be involved in the making of a book, and this new vocation gave me that opportunity. Tom King, Ken Adams, and I decided that my first project would involve a series of interviews with current and former employees of Harrah's, with the goal of determining the reason for the success of that organization—arguably one of the best casino organizations ever put together. While continuing to work on my Reno history project, which would eventually be titled *The Rise of the Biggest*

Little City, I began the process of selecting, researching, compiling questions for, and finally interviewing a group of current and former employees of Harrah's.

The pre-interview process takes much longer than the interview itself, and the post-interview process takes even longer. It was a little over two years from the time that I conducted my first interview until the book, *Every Light Was On*, was published in May of 1999. The book proved to be a success, and I am proud to have been a part of preserving the history of Mr. William Harrah and his clubs.

Later in the same year, the year of my seventieth birthday, I had the thrill of seeing *The Rise of the Biggest Little City* being published. On December 1, 1999, it was presented to the public at a book signing held at the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno. Once again, I felt honored to have the residue of my luck come to fruition.

Currently I am involved in the interviewing and editing process of two oral history projects. The first relates to the oral histories of former employees of Harolds Club and to members of the Smith family. The second is concerned with the history of Pete Cladianos Jr., a native of Reno who, along with his father, was a pioneer in the lodging and gaming industry.

DWAYNE KLING
Reno, Nevada
December 2000

GLOSSARY

THE GAMING TERMS in this glossary were defined for us by Dwayne Kling. When using the glossary the reader should keep in mind that these terms have evolved informally from within the gambling subculture. Their meanings are often imprecise; they may have meanings not listed here; and their use may be idiosyncratic or specific to certain times and places in the history of gaming in America. In other words, this glossary is the best that we can do, but we offer no guarantees that it has application beyond the context of this book.

bottoms, *n.* Mis-spotted dice. Normal dice are spotted so that opposing sides add up to a total of ten, but this is not the case with mismarked dice. (See also “tops.”)

box man, *n.* A person who supervises the craps game and is responsible to the pit boss.

card counter, *n.* A twenty-one player who tracks, by suit and by number, the cards that have already been played in a game.

catwalk, *n.* In early casinos, an area in the ceiling above the casino floor, usually concealed by one-way mirrors through which one could

observe the games. In most casinos this type of observation has been replaced by video surveillance. (Also called a “lookout.”)

come bet, *n.* (Craps) A bet on the next roll of the dice after a point has been established.

crossroad, *n.* A person who cheats casino games.

dead game, *n.* A game that is open but has no players.

deuce dealing, *n.* A form of cheating in which the top card of the deck is not dealt, but rather the second card, or deuce, is dealt.

drop, *n.* 1) The total amount of cash handled plus the markers drawn at a game during a given time frame; 2) The amount of money emptied from a slot machine.

drop box, *n.* A receptacle under a gaming table in which currency used to buy chips or tokens is deposited (or “dropped”) by the dealer.

eighty-six, *v.* To ban from a casino.

flats, *n.* Loaded dice.

floor man, *n.* A person who supervises a specific area of gaming (e.g., slots, pit games).

handmuck, *v.* To illegally enter extra cards into a deck.

hard eight, *n.* A roll of the dice consisting of two fours, one set of fours on each die. (A hard six would be a roll involving two threes, a hard ten would have two fives.)

horn bet, *n.* A one-row bet on the craps table covering the numbers 2, 3, 11, and 12.

juice, *n.* Connections with important people.

layout, *n.* The cloth covering on a gambling table.

marker, *n.* An instrument used to extend a certain amount of credit to a player.

number one dice, number two dice—see “one dice”

on and off bets (to pay), v. (Craps) To use a dealer’s shortcut method of paying a player’s come bet that is coming off a number at the same time that the same player’s new wager is going on that number.

one dice, two dice, etc., n. Table numbers for the various crap games in a pit set up.

point, n. (Craps) A number established by the shooter on the first roll of the dice.

shift manager, n. The individual in charge of an entire casino for an eight-hour shift.

shift supervisor, n. The individual in charge of a particular department for an eight-hour shift.

squares, n. Legal dice.

station-operated game, n. A keno game for which bets can be taken at an annex or “outstation”.

stiff, n. (Twenty-one) A hand that could go over twenty-one if a player or dealer takes a hit.

tokens, n. Tokens, monies, or chips given to dealers by players as gratuities or tips.

tops, n. Mis-spotted dice. Normal dice are spotted so that opposing sides add up to a total of ten, but this is not the case with mismarked dice. (See also “bottoms.”)

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